THE INDIAN STAGE

Vol II.

By

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To

SHYAMA PRASAD MUKHERJEE, Esq,

Vice-chancellor, Calcutta University.

PREFACE

Dr. Johan Vanmanen, who wrote a masterly and erudite preface to my first volume of the Indian Stage, has also dealt with the contents of the present volume in the said preface and no further introduction is therefore necessary. I beg to express my heart-felt gratitude to him for the appreciative references he has made about me.

The first volume deals with the stage as described in "Nāṭyaśāstra", dramas and stage as inscribed in rocks and stones, dramas of Bhasa, Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, Yatras and the plays in which Srichaitanya took delight and the full history of the English Stage of the eighteenth century—the Play House, the Calcutta Theatre, the Chowringhee Theatre and the Sansouci Theatre, and the stages in the houses of Babus Prasanna Kumar Tagore and Nabin Krishna Bose, up to the middle of the nineteenth century.

The present volume takes us to the earliest Bengali Dramas including Bhadrarjun Natak, Kulinkulasaarvaswa, Sakuntala, Venisanhar, Sarmistha, Bidhavabivaha Natak, Nildarpan Natak and Ramabhisek and other Nataks and how these were

staged. Later, we get a full history as to how the theatre that was confined to the few aristocratic families came to be moulded by a middle class expert, and last of all, the sensational stories that read like a romance, as to how the theatre was put under a ban under the Dramatic Performances Act.

It will be height of ingratitude on my part if I fail to acknowledge the kindly help rendered by my ex-pupil Mr. Sacchidananda Bhattacharya, the merchant prince of Bengal and an erudite scholar, philosopher and philanthropist towards the publication of this and the previous volume. But for his help and encouragement, neither of the volumes would have seen the light of the day.

Pandit Narendra Chandra Vedantatirtha, M.A. has put me under a deep debt of obligation by going through the whole book in proofs and giving the correct rendering of the diacritical words. I am also thankful to my friends Messrs. Amulya Bhusan Chatterjee, M.A. and Sailendra Nath Sen, B. Com. for the kind assistance rendered by them.

I must admit with gratitude the help rendered to me by Mr. Sailendra Nath Mitra M.A., Secretary Post-graduate Department, Calcutta University, Babu Nalini Ranjan Pandit, Kiran Chandra Dutt M.R.A.S., and Babu Kshetra Mohan Mitra, the famous actor of the Bengali Stage. All of them helped me materially. I have got much help from my friends

Mr. B. N. Das, B.L., M.L.A., Rangoon and Prof. Jitesh Chandra Guha M.A., B.L.

I received enormous assistance from Babu Devendra Nath Bose, one of the distinguished authors and critics of the day and Natyacharya Amrita Lal Bose, who was a victim of the unjust Surendra-vinodini prosecution.

My books contain the fruits of unremitting researches, in this particular department of Indian culture, carried on for twenty years under great difficulties. The Calcutta University has already given me enough patronage and I hope and trust, the book will receive the warmest appreciation from the cultured public.

124/5B, Russa Road,
Calcutta.

Author.

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Books on Drama & Stage by the Author.*

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INDIAN STAGE

Vol. II

I. THE EARLY BENGALI PLAYS

We have seen from the preceding volume that though the revival of the Drama in Bengal dates from the time of Śrīchaitanya, direct impetus to the modern Bengali stage was, however, given by the early English Theatres of Calcutta, of which the Chowringhee Theatre stood the most prominent. This historic house exercised a great deal of influence upon the educated community of the Hindu citizens of Calcutta and its principal patron in its evil days was the late Prince Dwarka Nath Tagore. The Yātrās, on the other hand, that were the main source of popular entertainment, fell into decline on account of their degenerating into low taste and high erotic tune. This caused indeed a great loss to the country, for in the absence of other mediums, the Yātrās were a kind of popular institution for the spread of mass education. Really with the disappearance of the Yātrās, many good things were lost to Bengal.

The introduction of dramatic performances in the place of the ancient Yātrās was to a great extent due to the spirit of the time. Bengal was then passing through a phase of rapid changes. The leaven of the western civilisation entered into Bengali life and it rapidly attacked the Bengali society both for good and bad. Yātrās, too, degenerated into vulgar shows, and educated minds discountenanced those altogether. Thus when first the Hindu Theatre was opened at the house of Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore, "Reformer" writing in the *Calcutta Journal,* January, 1832 (pp. 6-7), was jubilant at the resuscitation of the Hindu Theatre, as will be evident from the following quotation from that Journal :—

"What child of enlightenment, what men of patriotic feelings will not hail with raptures of joy that day when our hitherto degraded countrymen will turn their backs with disgust against the gross, barbarous and obscene performance of Cobies and Yātrās to relieve their aching heart by the sign of a rational and dignified performance on the stage of our Hindu Theatre ?"

Raja Ram Mohan, too, at about the time boldly attacked the huge mass of superstitions accumulated through centuries of slavery and national degeneracy. He reformed the language, held up the lofty religious cult of the Upaniṣads and banished from the land many shameful practices and atrocious crimes that were perpetrated in the name of religion. The great

reformer was followed by a host of capable apostles of light, and their names are the proud legacy of that eventful time. Religion, morality, politics, literature and art came under the pitiless glare of critical inquiry and much filth and dirt were removed to help a healthy national growth. In this all-embracing movement for national regeneration, drama replaced the ancient Yātrās. Many notable persons of that time lent their hands in this particular department of poetic art. Even men like Keshav Chandra Sen, Pratap Chandra Mazumder, Narendra Nath Sen, W. C. Banerjee, Michæl Madhusudan Dutt, and Rajendra Lala Mitra took active part in dramatic performance, each one an intellectual force of Bengal, not to speak of the deathless glory which Keshav Sen reaped as a religious preacher. Even the aristocracy did not lag behind; many cultured and wealthy citizens of Calcutta worked for the uplift of the people and drama received great patronage in their hands. No civilised nation can be without its drama, and it was only natural for such intellectual giants like Madhusudan, and Keshav Chandra to espouse the popular cause. Bengali drama was thus in a tage of development and we would better treat the ıbject in its chronological order.

The pioneer in introducing dramatic performances Bengali, as we have already seen, was Lebedeff, with his worthy co-adjutor Golak Nath Das, d in 1795, a Bengali play for the entertainment

of the Bengali audience but time drew a veil of oblivion over their noble efforts, though they surely deserve grateful tribute of Bengal. The man who next took up this cause was Nobin Krishna Bose, who staged Bharat Chandra's *Vidyā-sundar* in his residential house at Shyambazar in 1833. In the interval between Lebedeff's enterprise and Nabin Babu's Theatre, there were exhortations in the *Samācāracandrikā* and occasionally by others for dramatic performance in Bengali, but they went unheeded, though almost every educated man of that time felt the want of a Bengali Stage. It was only in 1831 that the liberal and enlightened Zeminder, Prasanna Kumar Tagore with his colleagues started the Hindu Theatre for the entertainment of the Bengali audience. But the plays acted there were all in English. Nabin Babu's Theatre was really the first genuine endeavour for the performance of Bengali drama, after a lapse of about thirtyeight years from Lebedeff's ! After Nabin Babu's Theatre, the Bengali students and actors again reverted to English plays and the Oriental Theatre staged English plays for the entertainment of the educated Bengalees. But with time at last there grew ar anxious craving for the Bengali plays.

In the preceding volume we have mentioned o or two Bengali plays, but we shall now trace growth of the modern Bengali Drama from its Sanskrit model to its present westernised

Attempts were at first made to write Bengali dramas after Sanskrit style. But since such plays did not meet with public approval, the Sanskrit model was given up and was replaced by the western ideal.

The growth of the Bengali drama is really interesting, for in the beginning the attempts were only crude. The most noticeable attempt to write a Bengali Drama was that by Bharat Chandra, the famous poet of the *Vidyāsundar*. It was he who first thought of introducing Bengali dialogues and Bengali characters in a Bengali drama. He commenced the drama *Caṇḍī* shortly before his death. In the opening verse or Nāndī, the sūtradhāra eulogises the virtues of the poet's patron, Raja Krishna Chandra of Krishnanagore, a Bengali Zeminder of repute who lived at the time of the Battle of Plassey. The characters of the drama are Goddess Caṇḍī, her enemy Mahiṣāsur and the Prajā or the people.

The Sūtradhāra speaks in Sanskrit, but his wife, Naṭī, replies in Bengali, as a woman does in Prakrit in a Sanskrit drama. Goddess Caṇḍī, the demon Mahiṣāsur and other characters speak in Bengali. But their dialogues contain an excessive mixture of Sanskrit, Hindi and Persian words. The poet died fore the play was completed. One cannot too much gret the loss, for it was the first attempt after a ngali drama by the greatest poet of that time.

This is the fragment of the *first* Bengali drama that we possess, and was written about the year 1760.

After a lapse of about twenty years, there was another attempt to write a drama in Bengali by a Sanskrit scholar, Pandit Vidyanath Vachaspati Bhattacharya of Nadia. The name of the drama is *Citrayajña.* It is the *second* instance of a Bengali drama.

Though Babu Kaliprasanna Sinha calls it a Sanskrit Drama*, H. H. Wilson considers it as a heterogeneous composition. It was composed about the year 1778.* "It is so far valuable," says Wilson† "as conveying a notion of the sort of attempts at dramatic composition made by the present race of Hindus in Bengal. The Yātrās or Jātrās which are occasionally represented in the Bengali language follow the plan of *Citrayajña,* with still less pretensions to a literary character. They are precisely the Improvista Comedia of the Italians, the business alone being sketched by the author and the whole of the dialogue supplied by the actors. The dialogue is diversified by songs which are written and learnt by heart. Some improvement, however, has been made

* Vide preface to *Vikramorvaśī* translated in Bengal about the year 1857, under the auspices of "Vidyotsāhi Sabhā. It speaks of *Citrayajña,* written about 80 ye[illegible] ago."

† Vide Wilson's "The Theatre of the Hindus", Appen[illegible]

of late years, in the representation of the performance; the details of the story are more faithfully and minutely followed and part of the dialogue is composed and taught by the author to the actors."

(3) The third noticeable attempt was that of Lebedeff and we have made extensive reference to the translation of *Disguise* and its representation on the stage in Vol. I, pages 219-258.

(4) We next hear of a farcical comic piece *Kalirājār Jātrā* which was played in 1821. The *Saṃvādakaumudī* a vernacular paper edited by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in its issue No. VIII of 1821 mentions a drama named *Kalirājār Jātrā* (which to convey the spirit of the drama, may be translated as the "Journey of Mephistoples"). Unfortunately, a copy of this journal could not be found, but we have from the *Calcutta Review* of 1850 (Vol. XIII page 160) stating that "a new drama, *Kalirājār Jātrā* is being performed."

The word "Jātrā" has, however, raised some misconceptions in the minds of some critics who hold it was not a drama. The *Saṃvādakaumudī* describes the play as a comedy. The *Calcutta Review* calls it "drama". "Jātrā" here does not mean "the musical opera" but only 'journey', as has been amply shown in the following account given in English in the September issue of the *Asiatic Journal*, 1822 which

derived its information from the Bengali paper, the *Saṃvādakaumudī* :

> "A descriptive account of a drama newly invented and of the characters personated in it. It is denominated the "Colly Raja's Jatra". It was stated in a former number that when a full account of the comedy was received it should be laid before the public. It is composed of various actors who are well-versed in the act of "Singing and dancing". The following is the order of their appearance on the stage. First, two Baistambas ; second, the Kalirāj; third, the Vizier; fourth, the preceptor; fifth, a noble and well-dressed Englishman "Just come from Chattogram" with a lady; sixth, the only man-servant and maid-servant of this young gentleman. In the last scene when all these are assembled, they began to dance and sing with a voice as melodious as that of the Cuckoo, talk witty things and thus excite the laughter and put into rapture those Babus who assembled there from different quarters and some of whom are very much interested that in process of time this comedy will become very popular."

No doubt Yātrās were in vogue at that time and *Samācāradarpaṇ*, 26th Jan. 1822 called it a musical opera—"Natoon Jātrā", but here 'Jātrā' evidently refers to the journey of the Kalirāj from Chittagong to Calcutta and it is doubtful if the editor of *Darpaṇ* saw the performance· A similar idea is found in Pandit Khirode Prasad Vidyavinode's *Dādā O Didi*

staged in 1907, a play since put under ban by the Government. In so late a play as *Khāsdakhal* by the veteran comedian, late lamented Babu Amrita Lal Bose, we find Kali * directing his steps towards Calcutta where, he says, a good many of his institutions have thrived. The above piece was really not a Yātrā and Raja Ram Mohan, too, would not have called it a drama, if it really were not so. Besides, the only kind of Yātrā in vogue at that time was the *Kṛṣṇa Yātrā,* or *Nala-Damayantī* Yātrā or the like and there is hardly any tradition preserved in Bengal about a Yātrā in which Kali figures as a character. On the other hand, people had commenced to feel a liking for English theatres.

(5) That similar light dramas were at that time represented, may be gathered from the same number of the *Asiatic Journal*, borrowing facts from the *Saṃvādakaumudī* of 1822 in its issue V. The significant lines occur there :

"Letter from a correspondent pointing out the immoral and evil tendencies of dramas or plays recently invented and performed by a number of youngmen and recommending their suppression."†

* Kali is the evil genius of this age, who like a second Lucifer delights in leading men astray in perverse ways which ultimately lead to their destruction.

† (A. J. Sept. 1822.)

It is not possible to find out what and of what type those dramas were. Obviously, they were not dramas of good taste. Most likely, they were farcical comedies or Satirical plays but certainly they were not Yātrās as treated of Kṛṣṇa and Gopīs, Nala and Damayantī or, at later stage, of Vidyā and Sundara.

(6) The *Calcutta Journal* speaks of a new book, a translation from English of William Franklin's *Comroopa* by Babu Jagamohan Bose of Bhowanipur, who from the above work again published a comedy denominated *The Comroopa Yātrā*. The comedy was performed on Saturday night, the 9th March 1822, at the house of Shyamsundar Das of the same place.* This too was not a Yātrā but meant journey to Comroopa.

(7) We have next noticed Kṛiṣṇa Miśra's *Probodhcandrodaya Nāṭak* at page 70 Vol. I. of this book. A Bengali translation of the drama was published in the year 1822 under the name of *Ātmatattvakaumudī*, the translators being Kashinath Tarkapanchanan, Gadadhar Nyayaratna and Ramkinkar Siromani. It was in 6 Acts. There is a mention of this book in the catalogue of books in the British Museum also.† It is an instance of the early attempt

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* *Calcutta Journal*, Vol. II, No. 76, p. 309, 1822.

† Vide, Dr. Jayantakumar Das Gupta's article "Some early dramas in Bengal" in the *Advance*, dated 10th April,

of the Hindus to bring out only translations of Sanskrit dramas. It was also really admirable to publish drama at a time when a section of the people was fond of very light shows. It was priced at Rs 2/- and printed at the Chandrika Press. (Vide, *Samācāracandrikā* of 1831, 2nd. May).

(8) Rev. J. Long in his catalogue of 1100 Bengali books, published in 1852, speaks of:

(i) *Hāsyārṇava*, a farce written in 1822.

We have not got a copy of this, but would supply our readers with an English translation of the review by Rajendra Lala Mitra in his *Vividhārthasaṅgraha* of Chait, 1780 (Śaka):

"Under the cover of a dramatic piece, foolish lustful King, avaricious minister, ignorant physician, cowardly soldiers have all been severely dealt with ; though it is laughable and short, it is not received with regards owing to the obscenity it exhibited."

(ii) *Kautukasarvasva Nāṭak*, a better drama than the above. Both are, however, translations from original Sanskrit pieces. The *Asiatic Journal* of Sept. 1822 might have referred to dramas of this nature.

1932, which runs as follows :—"Schuylar's Bibliography of the Sanskrit Drama and the British Museum Literary Catalogue of Bengali Books (1883) mentions a Bengali paraphrase of Kṛṣṇa Miśra's famous drama *Prabodhacandrodaya* published in 1822.

Rev. Long has mentioned *Kautukasarvasva Nāṭak* as a drama by R. Chundra Tarkalankar of Harinavi.

Zenker described it "Drama in Bengali per R. Chundra Tarkalankar de Harinavi." Both Long and Zenker put the date as 1830. Blimhardt in his catalogue of Bengali books in the British Museum Library (1866) speaks of the *Kautuka-sarvasva Naṭak*, by Gopinath Chakrabarty as *Kali-Vatsarājār Upākhyān* based on the story of Kali-Vatsa-rājā, a Sanskrit play with intervening portions appearing in a Bengali version in prose and verse by Ram Chundra Tarkalankar in 1828. The *Samācāracandrikā* of May 1831 referred to this drama as well as *Prabodhacandrodaya Nāṭak* as ready for sale in the office with price of Re. 1. Pandit Gopinath, author of the original, composed this drama for performance in the house of some wealthy citizen. It is a two-act play opening with an invocation to Gaṇeśa in *tripadī* verse. H. H. Wilson in his *Theatre of the Hindus* wrote of the Sanskrit original as "a satire upon princes who addict themselves to idleness and sensuality and do not patronise the Brahmins." The language of the translation is commonplace and is often a mixture of the highsounding and vulgar. There are many stanzas in *Payār* and *Tripadī* verse. The translator calls his language *Sādhubhāṣā*. Some

people, especially the ficticious Dhanañjay Mukherjee in a Brochure entitled *Vangīya.Nāṭyaśālā* published by Babu Nalini Ranjan Pandit (Page 2, line 15) has confused this drama with Vidyāsundar just as Lebedeff's *Disguise* has been similarly confused in the *Viśvakoṣa.**

It is believed that Shakespeare's *Tempest* was translated into Bengali by a civilian about the year 1829, but no copy of the work has been found or described anywhere.

(9) Next, we have *Vidyāsundar* (of Bhārat Chandra) acted at Nabin Babu's house in the year 1833.[1], but its importance lies in that next to *Kalirājār Yātrā* it was an original Bengali work acted on the stage. It shows the hankering of a philanthropically disposed Bengali to try anything good in his mother tongue in preference to English or Sanskrit or mixed drama.

(10) Long's catalogue of Bengali books mentions two dramas, *viz.*, Kālidāsa's *Śakuntala* translated and published by Sj. Rāmtarak Bhattacherya in 1840[2] and *Ratnāvalī*, a Sanskrit drama by Harṣa-Vardhan, king of Kashmira rendered into Bengali by Nilmani Pal.

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*Vide *Raṅgālaya*, Vol. 16 and observations of the *Indian Stage*, Vol. 1, page 222.

1. See Vol. 1. pp. 285-294.
2. See also *Saṃvādprabhākar*, 28th June 1848.

(11) A Kāvya called *Ramaṇī Nāṭak* by Panchanan Banerji of Shyampukur, printed in 1848. (See below, No. 12).

(12) A drama named *Kīrtivilās* is also mentioned in Long's catalogue[1] as being recently composed, printed and published with the permission of the Vidyaṃvada Sabhā. Rev. Long mentions it with the following descriptions:

> *Kīrtivilās* or the evils of Stepmother—A drama in 5 acts by G. C. Gupta P. P. 70 B. S. Price 12 as. Subject—A King's son near the Jumuna committed suicide owing to the cruelties of his stepmother. The book shows considerable talent.'

(13) Long in his catalogue of Bengali books also mentions a drama called *Mahānāṭaka i. e.*, Rāmcandra's history dramatised in 1849 by Pandit Ramgati Nyayaratna and translated into English by Raja Kali Krishna. That this was not possibly a Yātrā piece but a drama is clear from the fact that Mr. Long gave separate lists for Yātrā's and Nāṭaks.

(14) Some literary men including Rai Bahadur Dinesh Chandra Sen put *Prem Nāṭaka* by Babu Panchanan Banerjee of Shyampukur, Calcutta, as being the first Bengali Drama. We have come across two compositions by the same author, *Prem*

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1. See also *Saṃvādprabhākar*, 21st May, 1852.

Nāṭak and *Ramanī Nāṭak* but they are not dramas. They are really epic poems (Kāvyas) composed in *Tripadī* and *Payār* metres. There are no dramatic characters, nor any dialogues. The compositions display bad taste with an abundance of Ādirasa (amores) as the names suggest. *Ramanī Nāṭak* was printed in 1848 and *Prema Nāṭak* in 1853.*

(14) *Bhānumatīr Cittavilās* :—This was nothing but *Merchant of Venice* rendered into Bengali, probably about the year 1850-1852 by Babu Hara Chandra Ghose of Babugaunge, Hooghly, a scholar with much literary attainments. A copy of the book is available at the Imperial Library, Calcutta. As a translation it stands on the same footing as *Chadmabeś* or *Disguise*. Mr. Long puts it: "Translation with adaptations, well and ably done". He, however, gives no date. But in the *Prabhākara* of Iswar Gupta (Paush 1260 = December 1853) we find a mention of "a novel drama (*Abhinava Nāṭak*) by Babu Hara Chandra Ghose, Superintendent of Excise, Maldah, written on the principles of English dramas". (Iṃgrāji Nāṭaker Rityanusāre).

It appears that this drama was probably prior to *Bhadrārjuna* in-as-much as it is mentioned in

*Mr. Sarat Chandra Ghosal, M. A. B. L., Saraswati, the erudite scholar, first drew our attention to these books, in the now-defunct Bengali Monthly *Nārāyaṇa*, Magh O Chaitra 1321, edited by the late Deshabandhu C. R. Das.

Long's Çatalogue, whereas the other is not. Some persons always express difficulty in ascertaining the exact date of *Bhānumatī*. In the early September of 1909 one Mr. K. B. Dutt put a query in the *Indian Daily News* as to who was the first dramatist of Bengal. Our esteemed friend Mr. Kiran Chandra Dutt sent a reply on the 9th September, in the same paper telling that the author of *Bhadrārjuna* was the first dramatist. A correspondent signing himself as "Old man", contradicted him on the 24th September, saying that Hara Chandra Ghose of Hughly, who was the recipient of the Aukland prize in golden and silver watches in Muhammad Moshin's Hughly College in the year 1840 for a lucid translation of Bacon's *Truth* in Bengali, published his *Bhānumatīr Cittavilās* in 1850. Then came further news on the 27th September from "One who knows" that the drama was published in 1842.

There is no corroboration of the above-dates but what Hara Chandra Ghosh himself wrote in the preface of his next drama *Kauravvijay Nāṭak* will undoubtedly throw sufficient light on the matter. He says: "In 1852 I published my vernacular drama of the Merchant of Venice which was written at the suggestion of an European friend of native education." Hara Chandra further said that the work met with much appre-

ciation and emboldened him to write his next drama. It was really a novel thing to see a Shakespeare's play acted in oriental dress and with enthusiasm. We, however, have no record of any performance. The names are all Indian, showing how Hara Chandra tried to remodel western stories into Bengali, at a time when there was still in the country a bias for Sanskrit plays.

Bhānumatī was a replica of Portia and the scene shifted from Ujjain to Guzrat. Sulocanā and Suśīlā are her attendants. There is a regular benedictory verse, a hymn to Sarasvatī, and an attempt to please courtiers by an ode to vernal pleasures. For acts and scenes the author uses the words *aṅka* and *aṅga*.

(15) *Bhadrārjun Nāṭak*—In 1852, certainly next to *Bhānumatīr Cittavilās,* was published this much-talked-of drama under the name *Bhadrārjun Nāṭak** from the pen of Tara Charan Sikdar and containing the story how Arjun, the third Pāṇḍava carried away Bhadrā (Subhadrā, the sister of

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* Mamaiṣā bhaginī Pārtha
Sāraṇasya sahodarā ;
Subhadrā nāma bhadraṃ te
Piturme dayitā sutā.
Kalikātā Caitanya-candrodayayantre mudrita,
Śakābda, 1774.

This was on the title-page.

Kṛṣṇa). We had an opportunity of going through the book and this book alone may be called the first and original dramatic attempt in Bengali literature on record. In the preface Tara Charan writes that various Sanskrit dramas had then been translated into Bengali. We do not know whether *Bhadrārjun* was ever acted.* He, however, made a new departure in the dramatic mode, which was subsequently followed by almost all dramatists of Bengal. He avoided the classical convention of introducing *Prologue* and *Epilogue*. In the *Bhadrārjun*, there is neither the *Sūtradhāra*, nor *Nāndī*, nor similar dramatic devices that are indispensable to a Sanskrit play, nor do we find any *Vidūṣaka* or professional jester in the drama. Michael M. S. Dutt, the great Bengali poet, who composed his *Śarmiṣṭhā* seven years later, once wrote to his friend Raj Narayan Bose that in writing dramas he would not allow himself to be bound by the rules of Sanskrit Rhetoric, but would look to the great dramatists of Europe for his models. Tara Charan Sikdar, who preceded Michael in shaking off the fetters of the Sanskrit model, deserves all praise for his literary courage in rising above the formalities of a dead language, which would have certainly impeded the varied

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* *Vilvamaṅgal*—Mr. Jogindra Nath Bose mentions a drama of this name in his *Biography of Madhusūdan*, but so far we have not been able to trace the work in print or in reference.

growth of the Bengali drama. It must not be forgotten that the first Bengali dramatist, who introduced the innovation, was Babu Tara Charan Sikdar and not Michael Madhu Sudan Dutt, though the latter, by the wealth of his imagination and vigour of style, has completely cast the pigmy reformer into oblivion and might not have known about his predecessor or his drama at all. Tara Charan writes in the preface :

> "The book has been written in a quite new style. Hence we think it necessary to give some idea of it in brief. In its dramatic action and situations this drama is after European model but there is no departure from the old style of composition in prose and poetry. I have done away with certain characters of the Sanskrit drama e.g., *Nāndī*, *Sūtradhāra* and *Naṭī* on the stage by way of prelude, nor have I inserted the character of Vidūṣaka. For Scene the word "saṁyogasthal" has been used.

There was another great innovation in Sikdar's drama. The speeches were written in prose, but rhyming doggrels, both short and long, were now and again put into the mouths of the actors.

The preface again is greatly valuable from the point of history. We get therein some idea of the nature of dramatic appreciation then existing among the Bengalees. The preface says that in those days Bengali actors expressed their thoughts in songs and

jesters excited the audience to laughter on unnecessary occasions. The author has purposely avoided age-long vagaries and deserves all praise due to a pioneer.

Subhadrā was a favourite theme with the poets of the time. Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote an unfinished drama of the name. Nabin Chandra's conception of Subhadrā in *Raivatak and Kurukṣetra* was full of grandeur and Bankim Chandra, too, was obsessed with her ideal in *Viṣavṛkṣa*. So the topic was a popular one, but there was no action in the drama and though Bhīma's anger, Baladeva's pride and Nārada's quarrelsome spirit were shown, Draupadī was given a minor place and no individuality was traceable in Satyabhāmā or Rukmiṇī. Conversations, though vulgar, were, however, true to domestic life.

The composition, however, is commonplace and does not rise above the ordinary. Some people have spent much pen and ink over a remark of Mr. Jogindra Nath Bose and holds that the latter had no right to call it "of indecent taste". Mr. Bose nowhere calls the play obscene. What he says is that though *Bhadrārjun* is worth mentioning, the language is *kadarya i. e.,* bad.

To come to our list, Rev. Long mentions a few other dramas of this period :

(16) *Caitanyacandrodaya Nāṭak*, or Caitanya's history dramatised—Translated by Prem Das B. A., in 1853, Re. 1-8 as, throws much light on the doctrines and life of Caitanya, who flourished four centuries ago.

(17) We have, however, in our possession, a work *Bodhenduvikāś Nāṭak** which may be considered a drama. This was from the pen of no other person than the most popular writer of the time, the poet Iswar Chandra Gupta whose illustrious pupils were the great Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and dramatist Dinavandhu Mitra. It was published in *Prabhākara* in 1260 B. S. (corresponding to 1853 A. D.) and though written on the Sanskrit model, we have both dialogue and songs in it. It is an imitation of the Sanskrit play called *Prabodhacandrodaya Nāṭak* and the characters are Madan, Ratī, Vivek &c. "The drama was completed" says the great Bankim "and after his death in 1265 B. S., his brother Ramchandra brought out in 1859 the first part from the portion with price of Re. 1-8 as, that had been published in *Prabhākara*." The rest has not up to day seen the light of the day. The drama contained many scenes, and the dialogues are not interesting, though some of the songs were excellent.

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* A copy of the above may be found in the Sahitya Parishad Library.

We have it on the authority of the dramatist Manomohan Bose that rehearsals of *Bodhenduvikāś* continued with great eclat, large sums of money were spent for it, but "no good came out of it except the recounting of songs of Hari (Viṣṇu)".* Rehearsals were in progress, as a correspondent of the *Hurkara* says really "*Prabodhacandrodaya* will be acted at a private theatre in a gentleman's house at Calcutta. It is a clever drama, but it is utterly unfit for the stage. A number of metaphysical dialogues can hardly interest the majority of those who seek amusement from those representations." †

The idea of staging was, however, given up as the enlightened section did not approve of it.

From an advertisement of *Prabodhacandrodaya* in the *Samācāracandrikā* of 1831, some maintain that this must be Iswar Gupta's translation of the Sanskrit drama of the same name. It is probably not true. As we have already noticed Iswar Gupta's imitation of the *Prabodhacandrodaya* was called *Bodhenduvikāś*, and *Bodhenduvikāś* would have been published long ago in Gupta's *Saṃvādprabhākara* (which was started in 1830) if it was an earlier

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*Vide, the Bengali Journal *Madhyastha* edited by him Paus 1280 B.S.) which is preserved in the Sahitya Parishad Library, Calcutta.

† *Hurkara*, 21st May, 1857 and *Hindu Patriot*, 28th May, 1857.

translation, and would not have been simply advertised in the *Candrikā*. Further, we have no evidence to show that Iswar Gupta was the author of this advertised Bengali drama. As we have seen, the *Bodhenduvikāś* was published in 1853 in his paper during the poet's life-time.

The one referred to in 1831 was probably *Ātmatattvakaumudī*—translation of *Prabodhacandrodaya Nāṭak*, as we mentioned in page 10.

(18) Another drama *Kali* by the same author Iswar Chandra Gupta is also a similarly unfinished work.

(19) The *Prabhākar* of 20th November, 1855 and 14th December, 1855 notices two dramas *Vidhavā-udvāha Nāṭak* ('widow-marriage drama')* and '*Babu Nāṭak*', published by "the late Babu Kaliprasanna Sinha, Secretary and Priyanath Bose, Assistant Secretary of the Vidyotsāhinī Sabhā." The former was priced at Re. 1 and the latter at eight annas. The *Babu* had been first published about two years previous to the first, and in absence of any copy we are not definite whether it was a drama or a piece like Babu Amrita Lal Bose's farce of this name.

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* It will be worthy of note here, that Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagore's first work on widow marriage was published in 1854, and this must have influenced the *Vidhavā-udvāha Nāṭak* and similar other works.

Last but not the least, we come to most important drama of the chapter.

(20) *Kulīnakulasarvasva* by Pandit Ram Narayan Tarkaratna of Harinabhi, 24-Parganas.

It was not a translation but the first serious attempt at drama, and it has been highly spoken of by contemporary journalists and men of culture. The circumstances under which the drama was composed are interesting. Babu Kalicharan Chaturdhurin, a Zeminder of Rangpur, North Bengal, announced in 1853 (i) in the *Bhāskar*, edited by Gauri Sankar Bhattacherjee (popularly known as "Gurgude Bhattacherjee", on account of his short dwarfish stature), and (ii) in the *Raṅgpur-vārtāvaha* (in first non-official organ) that a prize of Rs. 50/- would be given to the author of the best drama on the evils of Kulinism introduced in the country by Vallal Sen. It was at this time that the educated people were awakened to the social abuses eating into the vitals of the Hindu society, and Kulinism was one such evil. One man and very often an old man took to fifty, sixty and hundred wives, and not unoften a number of brides of ages varying from ten to sixty were married at the same *Lagna* (auspicious moment for the marriage), the Kulīn husband accepting a dowry in each case and not returning to these wives a second time. Ram Narayan Tarkaratna

(afterwards popularly known as *Nāṭuke Rām Nārāṇ*), who wrote the drama *Kulīnkulasarvasva,* won the prize. It aimed at eradicating the social and moral evils that had crept into the Hindu society from the scandalous practice of kulinism, which set up a quite arbitrary barrier between different classes of Brahmins.

Through the kind permission of his patron, Babu Kali Charan, Ram Naran had the book published in 1854, a review of which from the *Bhāskar* of the 23rd December of that year (corresponding to 9th Paush, 1261 B. S.), we give below (in English translation) :—

"We have received a copy of the new drama *Kulīnkulasarvasva* by Pandit Ram Narain Tarkaratna, senior professor, Hindu Metropolitan College. About the subject of the book, mention was made before in *Bhāskar* and our readers might remember that Tarkaratna got prize of Rs. 50/- by composition of this book, from the generous land-holder Srila Srijut Kali Charan Roy Choudhury and the latter appreciating the Pandit's merit presented the book back to him and got the book printed. We have gone through the whole book and been much pleased with it.

"The drama has been well-written, specially the parts of the clever Rashika and Fulkumari have been excellent. The conversations of Brahmin lady with her daughters which are quite natural, prove masterly craft of the writer. The

> episode of Dharmashil has been supported by various legends of the Purāṇas. In short, the book is an excellent one. A beautiful drama in Bengali like the present one will remove many evil practices from the society."

Rajah Iswar Chandra Singh also wrote to Keshav Gangulee :—"Ramnarain's K. K. S. has acquired a just and well-merited fame."*

As *Disguise* of 1795 was a translation, *Kalirājār Yātrā* (1821) a farcical piece, and *Vidyāsundar* of 1833 not a drama but a metrical composition, properly speaking *Kulīnkulasarvasva* was the first real Bengali Drama that was put on board the stage, in 1856 or earlier. The time too was very opportune for staging the play. Our readers should remember that only two years ago or so, the Oriental Theatre which had given performances in English and had just given up staging English dramas, (Vide, my *Indian Stage* 1st Vol., page 304, and Iswar Chandra Singh's reminiscences, p. 221) had almost become defunct owing to the want of Bengali plays for which they had a bias. The appearance of *Kulīnkulasarvasva*, therefore, at a time when the absence of Bengali drama was keenly felt, was very much welcomed by the young enthusiasts.

Kulīnkulasarvasva marks, therefore, the epoch and it was succeeded by a number of perform-

*(Michael's Biography by Jogindranath Bose, p. 220).

ances in Bengali in quick succession. Our friend, Mr. Brajendra Nath Banerjee strikes, however, a different note about the date of performance of this epoch-making and sensational drama. As we have already noted, Brajendra Babu's research is rather misleading and not unoften have we found him taking delight in his new 'discoveries', although based upon suppositions, their value must be taken at a discount.

Now the acknowledged and authoritative date of the first performance of *Śakuntalā* at Ashutosh Dev's house of which we shall speak later on, is on the 30th January 1857, and *Kulīnkulasarvasva* (K. K. S.) must have been therefore staged before that. But Mr. B. N. Banerjee quoting wrongly a stray passage from the reminiscences of late Babu Gaurdas Bysak about his friend Michael Madhusudan Dutt, wherein is mentioned the date of the first performance of *Kulīnkulasarvasva* as being March 1857 by mistake, jumps to the conclusion that *Śakuntalā* was staged first and *Kulīnkulasarvasva* followed it.*

The reminiscences in the third edition of the book, which have been taken principally as Mr. Banerjee's authority, run as follows :

* *Vaṅgīya-Nāṭyaśālār Itihās*, p. 41, by Brajendra Nath Bandyopadhyaya.

Modern Review, p. 524, Nov. 1931. Early history of Bengali Theatre by B. N. Banerjee.

"The credit of organising the *first* Bengali Theatre belongs to the late Babu Joyram Bysak of Churrokdanga Street, Calcutta, who formed and drilled a Bengali dramatic corps and set up a stage in his house on which was performed in March 1857, the sensational Bengali play of *Kulīnkulasarvasva* by Pandit Ramnarayana.

The success and popularity that attended this *first* experiment led the late Babu Gopal Das Sett to form a similar corps and set up a stage in his house in Ratan Sircar's Garden Street, on which the same play was repeated, before an enthusiastic audience. As naturally expected Vidyasagore and Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha encouraged the actors in Babu Gadadhar Sett's house, by their presence and personal interest."

"The late Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha evidently drew his inspiration of a native theatre *from* these performances........."

"*Then* the grandsons of the late Babu Ashutosh Deb gave some dramatic performances in their house........"

The above reminiscences,* however, give late Babu Joyram Bysak, in whose house K. K. S. was staged, the credit of organising the *first* Bengali Theatre and put *Śakuntalā* subsequent to it in point of time. The quotation, therefore, is not of much

* *Michael M. S. Dutt's Biography* by Jogindra Nath Bose, Page 648, Third Edition.

help to him even with regard to dates and a research scholar should have weighed facts before exploding the hitherto recognised theory or version. At the same time the short history given by Babu Gourdas Bysak, the most intimate friend of Madhusudan and one who was very closely associated with Bengali Theatre since 1857, is entitled to the greatest weight. One would therefore like to go deep into the origin or the source.

Now, the actual wording of the reminiscences that were put in the form of a letter written to the biographer of the poet by Gourdas Babu on May 1892 from 3, Bysak's Lane, Calcutta, gives the lie direct to any wild theory. They run as follows :

> "Next in 1853-54 some of the ex-students of the Oriental Seminary, who formed a Dramatic Corps under the drilling of Messrs Clinger and Roberts, who belonged to the *Sans Souci* Theatre and opened a stage, called the "Oriental Theatre" in the premises of the Seminary, where they acted the plays of *Othello* and *Merchant of Venice*, etc. It was Babu (since Maharaja) Jatindra Mohon Tagore, who first of all suggested to them that they should introduce native dramatic representations and organise a native Orchestra on the basis of our native instruments. Acting upon this hint they produced the sensational play of *Kulīnkula-sarvasva* and the theatre abruptly *became defunt in 1856.*

This novel amusement received a temporary encouragement from the late Kali Prasanna Sinha and the grandsons of the late Babu Ashutosh Dev, who set up a stage in their respective mansions on which were given some performances in our national style.

The date and the order given in the above letter about *K. K. S.* and *Śakuntalā* in Ashutosh Dev's house, which was incorporated verbatim in the first edition of the book,* leave no room for doubt that *K. K. S.* was the first drama staged in 1856, and *Śakuntalā* followed it (*i. e.,* in Jan. 1857). As the above letter is authentic we find it verbally copied in the second edition also.†

How could this passage be altered in the third edition in 1905 from the year 1856 to March 1857, when Babu Gourdas was no more in the land of living and the biographer Jogin Babu also did not offer any explanation of this change, one wonders. A letter can not change by the efflux of time. To us it appears that the change was made by the author or somebody who revised the third edition in the light of the history given by Jogin Babu in the body of the book. But here, too, he definitely states that *K. K. S.* was the first genuine Bengali attempt. (*Vide*, page 213 of the biography).

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* *Michael's Biography Pariśiṣṭa* by Jogindra Nath Bose, Pages 5-6 1st edition, 1893.

† *Pariśiṣṭa* (Page, 5 & 6) published in the year (1895).

The other proofs sought by Mr. Banerjee are also of no value. Since the performance began in 1856, it was repeated in Calcutta and other places too. The mention of *one* of the performances being in March 1857, does not make it subsequent to *Śakuntalā.** Besides, the play was acted four times in the house of Jagat-durlabh Bysak alone.† As the play was popular, it was acted even after *Śakuntalā.* Babu Kaliprasanna Sinha, too, was making arrangements for its performance after the representation of *Śakuntalā* at Ashutosh Dev's house.‡

Now, to give an account of the performance of the first genuine Bengali attempt, the stage was improvised in Bysak House at Churrokdanga (now Tagore Castle Road). It was constructed in the courtyard of the house under the supervision of Babu Rajendra Nath Banerjee—the Burra Babu, or the Head Clerk, of the East Indian Railway Company, with the assistance of Babu Jagat Durlabh Bysak.

Joyram Bysak, Jagat Durlabh Bysak, Narain Chandra Bysak, Rajendra Nath Banerjee, Mahendra Nath Mukherjee, Radha Prasad Bysak and Behari Lal Chatterjee (afterwards the manager of "Bengal Theatre") were the artists and of them Behari Lal

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* Vide, *Hindu Patriot*, March 19, 1857.

† Mahendra Nath Mukerjee's reminiscences. *Purātan Prasaṅga* (Prathama Paryyāya), pp. 148, 149.

‡ *Saṁvād-Prabhākara*, March 10, 1857.

was the first, who appeared as an actor on the public stage. All these persons were the former actors of the Oriental Theatre and it was about them, Babu Gaurdas Bysak must have made references in his above letter.

Next, about the performances at Sett's house,* we find reference to one of the performances in the *Saṃvād-Prabhākara* of 22nd March, 1858. It also appears that the *Hindu Patriot* of the 18th April 1858 devoted a few lines commenting upon performance in general. The latter was a disparaging criticism wherein it was averred "that the less said about the performances the better, but there were one or two persons whose talents as mimics may develop in the fullness of time."

A rejoinder was immediately sent to the press from the members of the *Vernacular Theatre* as it vas called and it was asserted there that men like ıbu Kisori Chand Mitter, Peari Chand Mitter,

* About the performance we get some idea from the reminiscences of Mahendra Mukherjee.

Rājendra Vāvu o Jagaddurlabh Vāvu divya bhunḍi laiyā māthāy lambā ṭiki vilambita kariyā Brāhmaṇa paṇḍit sājiyāchilen. Rājendra Vāvur haste ekaṭi śāmuker nasyādhār. Tānhārā duijane yakhan tarka vitarka kariten, takhan śrotṛvṛnda hāsiyā e uhār gāye paḍita, o uhār gāye paḍita. Ekaṭi sakher dala vājāita. Āmi kulācāryya sājitām.

—*Purātan Prasaṅga.*

Kshetra Chandra Ghose, Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitter and Nagendra Nath Tagore were all present at the performance and throughout the play they accorded to the actors their heart-felt and sincere approbation.

The *Saṃvād-Prabhākar* also highly spoke about the performance that was attended by 600 or 700 persons. Radha Prasad Bysak admirably represented the character for Ghatak and Sripati Mukherjee, Head Master of Janai School, appeared in the rôle of Dharamshila. The *Prabhākara* also bore testimony to the presence of Vidyasagore Mahasaya at the performance and in this point corroborates the statement of Babu Gaurdas Bysak.

Gopal Sett himself, the son of Babu Gadadhar Sett, in whose house the play was staged, Priyanath Dutt, Gadadhar's grandson, Nakur Chandra Sett and Narayan Chandra Bysak, who played in Bysak's house, were in their respective rôles here as well. Narayan appeared in the rôle of Jahnabi and in that of Rasika Naptini.

"The unprecedented sensation into which the whole native community was thrown", says Babu Gaurdas Bysak "after the celebration of the first widow marriage under the ægis of that redoubtable apostle of social reform, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagare, accounted for the interest and excitement which these performances of a play representing a social reform,

created at the time." Indeed, the *Kulīnkulasarvasva* was performed in the teeth of great opposition from a section of the Hindu community and that its influence was great upon the society, cannot be gainsaid. From the following extract of the *Hindu Patriot*, dated the 15th July 1858, it will be seen how the Kulīns of the Hooghly District were against its performance:

"The acting of the *Kulīnkulasarvasva Nāṭak* at Chinsurah has, it appears, given great offence to the Kulīns of the locality. The Nāṭak is an ill-executed burlesque. The acting took place in the house of a gentleman of the Baniya caste and Kulīn Brahmins intended, it is said, to retaliate in kind."

"The gentleman referred to," was probably Babu Narottam Pal.* Rupchand Pakshee, a noted musician of that time, composed songs for the occasion and sang them.†

From the very beginning, the Kulīns of Bengal were opposed to its performance ‡ and the *Hindu Patriot* does not seem to have been much in favour of the play.

But all those, who had the courage to stage the drama, deserve our respectful thanks for their noble

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* *Saṁvād-Prabhākara* (3rd July, 1858).

† Akshay Sarkar's reminiscences, *Father & Son.*

‡ *Calcutta Review* 1873, page 275.

innovation, which inspired others for Bengali plays at a time when the educated Bengalees and the students showed their decided preference and love for English dramas, and the College students acted only the English plays.

Kulīnkulasarvasva was thus a great innovation both as a drama and as an acting piece on the stage, and we repeat the words of Rajah Iswar Chandra that 'it acquired a just and well-merited fame.'

Next, we must mention about the drama *Svarṇa-śṛṅkhal Nāṭak*, which was staged at Barisal. One would not even wonder if he hears that this might have been staged even before *Kulīnkulasarvasva.* The book was printed at Dacca in 1863 and in the apologium was mentioned the following :

"About eight years ago, (that is in 1855-56) this drama was written at Barisal for its representation there."

We have, however, no further reference of this drama or its representation, but it seems that theatre was making its appearance even in Muffasil.

Chapter II

BENGALI DRAMAS IN THE MUTINY YEAR

1. At Chhatu Babu's House.

After *Kulīnkulasarvasva,* the next attempt was made in the house of Babu Ashutosh Dev, the millionaire of Calcutta, popularly known as Chhatu Babu by his grandsons, who called themselves as members of *Jñānapradāyinī Sabhā*. The drama was not an original one, but a translation of Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā* into Bengali by Nanda Lal Roy,[1] but all the same it was a genuine Bengali play. Although opinion was divided[2] as to its success, the attempt, however, was really very praiseworthy.

We have accounts of the performances of *Śakuntalā* in the above house, one on the 30th January[3] and another on the 22nd February 1857.[4] The stage wore a beautiful appearance and it was of the nature of a private theatrical, making an accom-

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[1] *Saṃvād-Prabhākar*, 15th June 1857.

[2] *Hindu Patriot*, 5th Feb. 1857.

[3] *Hindu Patriot*, 5th Feb, 1857.

[4] *Prabhākar*, 26th Feb. 1857.

modation of about 400 persons. Mr. O. C. Dutt (grandson-in-law of Chhatu Babu) composed songs and was the stage-manager.

Babu Priyamadhav Basu Mullick appeared in the rôle of Duṣmanta, Annada Mukherjee of Durvāsā, Mahendra Nath Mukherjee[1] of Kaṇva's disciple, Abinash Chandra Ghosh of Anasūyā and Bhuvan Ghosh of Priyaṃvadā and last and not the least Babu Sarat Chandra Ghosh (a grand-son of Chhatu Babu, a born actor and afterwards founder of the well-known Bengal Theatre) was in the rôle of Śakuntalā. Sarat Babu looked really grand and queenly in his gestures and address and did great justice to the part of the heroine he was enacting. The other amateurs also succeeded in creating an effect.[2]

This was the view of the contemporaneous paper, the *Hindu Patriot.*

It, however, held that full measure of success could not be realised and the corps dramatique required more polishing. Babu Kisori Chand Mitter, the great social reformer and a veteran journalist, went, however, a step further and considered the performance of *Śakuntalā* at Simla a failure. In his opinion *Śakuntalā* being a masterpiece of drama-

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[1] Vide, his reminiscences in *Purātan Prasaṅga.*

[2] *Hindu Patriot*, 5th Feb. 1857.

tic genius, required versatile and consummate talent rarely to be met with in this country.[1]

We hear of another performance at Janai (Hooghly) in the house of Babu Purna Chandra Mukherjee in May 1858. The gathering there was large and the stage and hall were nicely decorated and illuminated. The parts of Duṣmanta and Śakuntalā were ably performed and other parts well sustained. It was after all a "village theatre" with all defects for the first amateurs.

[*Hindu Patriot*, June 10, 1858.]

We hear of another play *Mahāśvetā*, a Bengali rendering of the famous Sanskrit novel *Kādambarī*.[2] Its author Mani Mohan Sarkar subsequently won reputation for the composition of a Yātrā piece, called *Uṣā* and *Aniruddha*, which, as we shall see hereafter, was the first Yātrā performance enacted by the master of dramatists Girish Chandra Ghosh. *Mahāśvetā* was first performed in Bhādra (September) 1857[3] at the house of Babu Charu Chandra Ghosh and the cast was as follows :

Rājā	...	Annada Prasad Mukherjee.
Puṇḍarīka (Naṭa)	...	Mahendra Nath Mazumdar.
Kapiñjala	...	Mani Mohan Sarkar (author).
Kañcukī	...	Shiv Chand Sinha.

[1] *Calcutta Review* 1873, page 282, Modern Dramas.

[2] *Saṃvād-Prabhākar* Sept. 16, 1857.

[3] The book itself gives this cast.

Mahāśvetā (Naṭī)	...	Kshetra Mohan Sinha.
Kādambarī	...	Mahendra Nath Ghosh.
Taralikā	...	Sarat Chandra Ghosh.
Rāṇī	...	Bhuban Mohan Ghosh.
Chatradhāriṇī	...	Mahendra Nath Mukherjee.

The Drama was published in Kārtik, 1266.

II. Vidyotsahini Theatre.

We now come to the Bengali Theatre in the house of late Kali Prasanna Sinha, who, though then a young man of 15 or 16 in the year 1857, took a leading part in the social, political and intellectual life of Bengali Hindus and founded a literary association, named *Vidyotsāhinī Sabhā* in his house in the year 1855.[1] This literary association, under the direct and close supervision of Kaliprasanna, did much in the resuscitation of the Hindu drama and Hindu Theatre by writing and staging Bengali plays after the style of Sanskrit dramas instead of attempting foreign pieces unsuited to the national taste. In the year 1857, Kaliprasanna started a Theatre, called the Vidyotsāhinī Theatre after the set of the Sabhā following in the wake of the Setts and Bysaks and after the model of Babu Sarat Chandra Ghose (Śakuntalā).

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[1] Mr. Manmatha Nath Ghose M. A., in his *Memoirs of Kaliprasanna Sinha*, has given this date and we, on a reference to all papers, consider it to be authentic.

Babu Gurudas Bysak, in his reminiscences, writes :—

"The late Babu Kaliprasanna Sinha evidently drew his inspiration of native theatre from these performances, for it was that time that he set up a stage in his mansion on which were produced in a superb native style and before a large and influential audience composed of the elite of the European and native society, Bengali renderings of the Sanskrit plays of *Veṇīsaṃhāra*, *Mālatīmādhava* and *Vikramorvaśī*. The first play, staged in this Theatre, was *Beṇīsaṃhāra*. rendered from the well-known Sanskrit drama of Bhaṭṭa Nyraṇa by Ram Narain Tarkaratna.[1] It was put on the stage on Saturday, the 11th April 1857 before a number of audience, as we get from a correspondent of *Hindu Patriot* (April 16, 1857):

"Last Saturday[2], the 9th instant another Hindoo Theatre was inaugurated under the title of Vidyotsāhinī Theatre. Several gentlemen, native and European, were present and the *Veṇīsaṃhār Nāṭak* was acted with considerable applause. The dialogues were mostly in *Payūrs* (couplets) and *Tripadīs* (triplets) instead of dramatic verses. But songs were wanting. The performance on the whole was very

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[1] Some wrongly held Kali Prasanna himself to be the author. (Vide, Preface of the book.)

[2] 11th and not the 9th was the Saturday.

creditable to the Young Hindu Amateurs to whose zeal and spirit the theatre owes its existence. As to how the performance was successful we would better quote the remarks of Mr. Ghose from his *Memoirs of Kaliprasanna*, page 28 :

"The performance was highly successful[1] and elicited unanimous praises from the European and native gentlemen of rank and station, who attended theatre. We have heard from reliable sources that Kali Prasanna, who represented the part of Princess Bhānumatī played it to perfection and was welcomed with roars of applause, when he appeared before the admiring gaze of the audience as a beautiful girl dressed in a rich, gold embroidered Benares *sāḍī* and decked with priceless jewels, which belonged to his family and excited the envy of the richest men in Calcutta."

Kali Prasanna Sinha, then a young boy of sixteen, was the observed of all observers. Adorned with ornaments and jewels, he appeared in the character of Bhānumatī. The jewellaries he put on would be worth more than a lac of rupees. Fort Williams Band played the Orchestra and Sir Cecil Beadon with a number of European gentlemen was present and encouraged the undertaking by his warm appreciation. As the above play was not quite suitable for the Bengali stage, its diction being

[1] Preface of *Vikramorvaśī*.

too heavy and as there was no drama besides *Kulīn-kulasarvasva* and the *Śakuntalā*, Kali Prasanna took upon himself the task of writing a suitable play :

Vikramorvaśī—a free translation of Kālidāsa's drama of the name was written and published in September, 1857 and staged at the Vidyotsāhinī Theatre with great eclat and the remarks of the *Hindu Patriot* would give a faithful account of its performance.[1]

There was no Sūtradhāra like the old Sanskrit drama and music consisted of both by amateurs and the Town Band. Kali Prasanna himself took the part of Purūravāḥ and performed it with consummate histrionic skill. The late Mr. W. C. Banerjee (then a boy of thirteen) and other distinguished men represented other parts. Not to speak of the *Hindu Patriot* of the time, Mr. Kishori Chand Mitter also in his posthumus article on *Modern Hindu Drama* failed not to notice the performance in the following words:

"There was a large gathering of native and European gentlemen, who were unanimous in praising the performance. Amongst the latter, Mr. Beadon, afterwards Sir Cecil Beadon, the then Secretary to the Government of India, expressed

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[1] *Hindu Patriot*, Dec. 3, 1857.

to us his unfeigned pleasure at the admirable way in which the principal characters sustained their parts."

Calcutta Review, 1873, p. 253.

We now quote extracts from the *Hindu Patriot*, December 3, 1857 :

The Vidyotsahini Theatre

Our readers will remember that about six weeks ago, we reviewed in these columns Baboo Kali Prasanna Sinha's translation of *Vikramorvaśī* of Kālidāsa. In the present issue, we have to notice the performance of that drama got up under the auspices of the same Baboo in his own mansion. The native gentry of Calcutta and suburbs representing the intelligence, taste, good sense, fashion and respectability of Hindu society, were all present in gorgeous winter garments but the audience was too large for the place and we hear with regret that many members of the Chowringhee aristocracy were obliged to run counter on account of the alarming density of the collection. Whatever the public may complain of with respect to the unrestricted distribution of tickets of admission, we must do justice to Baboo Kali Prasanna Sinha to whose liberal mind and general munificence, Calcutta owes a most significant institution for rational amusement. The Vidyotsahini Theatre is in the second year of its existence and though it is a private property, the intelligent and respectable public

may as freely enjoy its benefit as they do partake of the common air we live in. The eclat with which the *Vikramorvaśī* was performed on the last occasion was great. The stage was beautifully decorated and the theatre room was as nobly adorned as cultivated taste could dictate or enlightened fashion could lead to. No delicate consideration of economy was ever thought of, and the result was most magnificent and gratifying. The marble painting on the frontis piece of the stage was as neat as elegant, and the stone pictures of Bharata and Kālidāsa, though mostly imaginary, were executed with so much nicety and taste that one was involuntarily reminded of the classic days of Grecian Sculpture and painting casting into form Gods and Goddesses of heavenly birth. The reception was very courteous and gracious which was conducted by our excellent towns, man, Babu Huro Chunder Ghose. But we cannot afford space for details though the narration of which in the present instance is pleasant. We shall at once notice the performance leaving aside all unnecessary preliminaries and the grateful reminiscences of older drama.

The peculiar characteristic of our theatrical is the absence of dramatic opening which belongs to the *romantic school of the modern drama.* We have the old Grecian way of opening the play by the appearance of the Manager of the stage, who explains to the audience the nature and character and in some instances the incidents of the performances. But accom-

panimont of music and songs relieves that dull delay and patience-tresspassing colon, which like a forced march, is always tiresome, for we must bear in mind that the spectator has ever the incidents of the story vividly stamped on his mental vision and does not wait to be helped in the margin.

In B. S. Theatre the music was excellent, both when the amateurs performed and when the Town Band played. They awakened in the souls of the feeling portion of the audience, who had any sympathy for sounds the most pleasant emotions and kept the chord in a remarkably beautiful harmony. Of the performance nothing can be exaggeratedly stated. The part of the king Pūrarovāḥ represented by Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha was admirably done. His mien was right royal and his voice truly imperial. From the first scene of the play when he with his pleasant companion, a civilized buffoon commenced to interchange words of fellowship, to the last scene when he was translated with his fair Urvaśī to heaven, he kept the audience continuously alive and made a most gladsome impression on their minds. Every word he gave utterance to, was suited to the action which followed it. In the language of the poet he did truly hold the mirror up to nature. Whose heart did not palpitate with the most quick emotions when the king hearing the nymphs cry for help announced his approach in the most heroic strain and went to their relief ? The act was as

chivalrous as it was heroic. There was the romance of real life represented in true colours. But how sweetly does the language of love convey its meaning to a lover's mind. Urvaśī is rescued from the infernal clutches of the demon. She thanks in a soft but most eloquent language her gallant saviour ; Citralekhā, her lady of honour mingles in the song of thanksgiving, while the king hears in the dulcet air the most passionate voice of love.

The scene lay in the Hemcott range and the romantic objects that allured observations from around, with the angelic charm of Urvaśī and the glorious graces of her lovely companion, threw the mind of the King into a kind of magical enchantment and his vision henceforth became the heavenly fair. Then comes the scene of the descending of the Heavenly Car with Urvaśī and Citralekhā on, singing in a most rapturous strain and lapping the gazing soul literally, as it were, in Elysian bliss. If there could be angel visits on earth which poets sing of, the appearance of Urvaśī with her ethereal companion in the heavenly car was such a visit. It struck the heart of every one of the spectators. It almost realised the scriptural vision of Elija's ascension to Heaven. We have seen pictures of Grecian Gods driving chariots and read of ancient heroes skimming the air through such cars, but all the glowing figures of imagination which we have formed melted away as the mists disappeared and the heavenly car from Indra's region neared

our common earth. The attitude of Urvaśī on the car was delightfully picturesque, and the sweet songs and music which attended the descent, gave it the glow of an Arabian Night's dream. But the enchantment was not yet complete. She came and vanished like a vision. The king was restless, and in the madness of love appealed with child-like simplicity to the counsel of Vidūṣaka, the buffoon who like Lear's fool mocked his sorrow but never leaving his moralizing occupation.

The disconsolate Devee, wife to the king, worships the gods to cure her husband's misdirected love but subsequently moved by the frantic state of the Rājā disavows her worship, recalls prayer and seconds his wish to propitiate the deities to gratify his desire. This is the true picture of Hindu Lady, who at the sacrifice of her own happiness would even submit to austerities and observances for the fulfilment of her lord's wishes. Next opens the affecting part of the play. The commencement is solemn and the circumstance serious. The electric light opens upon the air and the artillery of heaven roars tremendously; in the midst of this scene the King enters singly and in a state of excitement, cries for Urvaśī in a most lamentable strain, turns his mind inward, discourses with his own soul, rings the bells of his passion and addresses the woods and trees, the birds and skies, in a most pathetic tone. This part of action was most difficult, and our friend Kaliprasanna did it well. There on addressing

the mountain—now the woods behind,—now the river beneath and now the birds above, with the essential pauses of affection, when the heart is rent by the agony of love, like Milton's Adam at the loss of Eve—the soliloquizing in the most pathetic manner and calling forth the most tender emotion from the deep wells of passion a la Hamlet—the repeated falls which the king met with from the negative replies which he construed in that frantic mood from the significant sounds that dropped—all these were quite natural and most admirably put into action. However we would not give anything for the Urvaśī for whom the king had spent so much breath. We doubt whether our countrymen would content themselves with presenting to the world such an Urvaśī, whom poetry represents as the paragon of beauty, as was represented at the B. S. T. But we do not disparage her. She will make a different being that is more acceptable,—if she continue on earth, for love-making in heaven is quite another affair, and is not suited to the taste of us mortals. "Bedooṣok" was ably performed, but his jokes were lost partly on account of the noise, and partly on account of the unintelligibility of the language. The Cowar was just like Home's Young Norval, and the caressing address of Urvaśī, set in tune, was most magnificently done. Other characters were indifferently good, but the voice, which spoke from behind the scene, was really abominable.

> While we thus do justice to Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha, we must, however, be allowed to express one patriotic wish. With all its excellencies the Vidyotsāhinī Theatre is a private establishment, though its very existence is a sign of the times. The attempt to cultivate the drama is justly praiseworthy, but what we would like to have is a public institution of the kind of a *permanent* character. The age is much too advanced to wait for an elaborate dissertation on the usefulness of such an institution in order to get it established. There are many among us, we know, with good sense and sufficiency enough to come forward and aid such a project and at the head of that band we unhesitatingly put down the name of Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha. Let the lovers and patrons of the drama form themselves into a body, take the project into their consideration and they are assured of every encouragement and co-operation from the *Hindu Patriot*.

The above remarks would show the part the press was playing in the resuscitation of Hindu drama, a thing quite worthy of it.

In 1858 Kali Prasanna wrote and published another drama of the name of *Sāvitrī-Satyavān*. To all intents and purposes it was an original drama, though the main plot was drawn from the *Mahābhārata*. *Vāvu*, it appears, was only a farce composed under the auspices of Vidyotsāhinī and there

s no evidence of its being put on boards of the heatres at all.

The story of *Sāvitrī* and *Satyavān* runs thus:

Sāvitrī the daughter of King Aśvapati had en-aged to be the wife of Satyavān, the son of the eposed King Dyumatsen, who had turned a ermit. Though revealed to her by the divine sage ıat Satyavān was to live only one year longer, she ıithfully kept her vow and was united in marriage) the hermit-prince. Agreeably to the prediction f the holy sage the prince died after one year but ıe faithful wife clung to his dead body and would ot deliver it up though claimed by Yama, the King f terrors in prison. At last King Yama, while iving *vara* (वर, boon), was fairly outwitted by the entle but heroic Sāvitrī and eventually Satyavān as restored to life.

There is a departure in this drama from the Sans-rit model, as regards the Aṅkas. It adopted the lan of European drama of the five Acts; our present ramas too are of five acts only.

The play was staged on the 5th June, 1858 * ıd successfully, like the previous performances. We et from *Calcutta Review* (1859, March, Vol. 32):

"The performance, we are bound to say, does no

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* *Prabhākar*, 4th June, 1858.

little credit to him. The characters are on the whole well-drawn, the scenes are interesting, dialogues smart and spirited and the style chaste."

We may here mention to our readers that Sāvitrī formed an interesting theme for many later dramatists. Pandit Kshirode Prasad produced one in 1902 at the Star and a few years ago in 1931 May, Star and Nāṭyaniketan, vied with one another in the representation of *Satī* on the stage. Sāvitrī is also an interesting topic for the present day cinema pictures.

In 1859 Kali Prasanna wrote and published another drama, the *Mālatīmādhava* or the Indian Romeo and Juliet, based on Bhavabhūti's well-known Sanskrit drama of the name. It was almost an original drama, interspersed with some beautiful songs. The author seemed from his preface to have adopted this more to the purposes of stage which could not be served by his previous dramas.

Kali Prasanna continued, till his death, to take a lively interest for the improvement of the Bengali Stage and Bengali Dramas, and if he lived more, we would have expected more valued efforts towards the revival of drama and stage. All his attempts towards new ideals and reforms, even before Madhusudan came to the field, were really very praiseworthy.

Chapter III

THE BELGACHHIA THEATRE

The first permanent stage of Bengal.

If any parallel is to be drawn, the Belgachhia Theatre was to Bengal, what the Glove was in England during the Elizabethan age. With it dates the beginning of the *permanent Bengali stage*, for all other attempts previous to this, however laudable or brilliant, were but sporadic and temporary, hence little abiding in their influence. Such was its enlightened atmosphere and cultural spell that soon pervaded the intelligentsia of Calcutta with a genuine love and desire for national drama and for a national stage. Above all, its service to Bengali literature is invaluable, and so long the language is spoken or written, its rich contributions will never be forgotten.

The Belgachhia Theatre drew out one of the greatest poets of the modern world, we mean Michael Madhusudan Dutt, and but for this it is doubtful whether Madhusudan would have seriously turned to Bengali literature at all. The thoroughly anglicised youth, who prided in his mis-spelling of a common Bengali word, has left the greatest classical work in

Bengali poetry. Our task of course is not to pursue Madhusudan's career as a poet, but to notice only a particular side of his great, versatile genius. Madhusudan is unquestionably the greatest classical poet of Bengal and one of the greatest masters of epic in world's literature ; and we may also unhesitatingly add that Madhusudan Dutt is the first great dramatist of Bengal and his plays are the first genuine dramatic works in Bengali literature. As a drama *Kulīnkulasarvasva Nāṭak* does not stand any comparison with *Kṛṣṇakumārī* and his two farcical comedies still hold high place among the witty productions in Bengali literature.

During the performance of the *Śakuntalā* in the house of Babu Ashutosh Dev, *vide* page 36, Babu (afterwards Maharaja) Jatindra Mohan Tagore, a highly enlightened zeminder of Calcutta and a nephew of Babu Prasanna Kumar Tagore met Raja Iswar Chandra Singh of Paikpara, Belgachhia, and his brother Pratap Chandra Singh, who, too, came to witness the performance. Iswar Chandra and Pratap Chandra were, in the words of Babu Gaur Das Bysak, two nature noblemen, "impregnated with true patriotic zeal for the welfare and advancement of the country." Jatindra Mohan in a highly opportune moment, when they were witnessing the performance, spoke to the brothers about the desirability of having a permanent Bengali stage. It was, asserted

Jatindra Mohan, a sheer waste of time and money to fritter away energy and enthusiasm in performances for a day or two. The idea was instantly taken up by the two brothers and in due course of time the famous Belgachhia Theatre came into existence. It was indeed a red letter day both for the Bengali drama and for Bengali language.

The history of the foundation of the Belgachhia Theatre can be gathered from a letter written by Raja Iswar Chandra Singh* to Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly, dated the *27th August 1858*, the year of the foundation of the Calcutta University :

> "When three or four years ago, you all quarrelled with the proprietor of the Oriental Seminary, we all proposed to have a native drama written out and acted; and such was our earnestness in the cause that we all asked you to select and hire a site and a native gentleman was asked either for the loan or hire of the premises. Somehow or other the subject dropped here, and was never thought of more till a year and a half ago, when we found some youngsters getting up a representation of a native drama. At this time a consultation was held and after much discussion the *Ratnāvalī* was fixed upon as the best drama or one of the best dramas that our Sanskrit could boast of. Then again came the difficulty of finding a man, who, with

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* *Vide*, page, 220, Michael's life by Jogindra Babu.

> a thorough knowledge of the language, would combine a dramatic talent. The man was at last found. Sometime before this the *Kulīn-kulasarvasva* had acquired a just and well merited fame and the author was *pitched* upon as the only pandit, who, with a good knowledge of Sanskrit, combined dramatic talent, and subsequently the translation was entrusted to him."

Next, Iswar Chandra proceeds to give an account as to how a year and a half they took to prepare the play by having too many rehearsals and fixing too many details.

The stage was built at enormous cost borne by the two Rajas of Paikpara and their magnificent Belgachhia villa formerly owned by Prince Dwarkanath Tagore, with the whole place appearing more like a fairy land, added considerably to the beauty and pomp of the dramatic entertainment.

The theatre opened with the performance of the drama *Ratnāvalī* beginning from 8-30 P. M. and closing at *12-30 on Saturday, July 31, 1858,* and about the success of the performance Babu Gaurdas Bysak, who was an actor himself and the best friend of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, described in his reminiscences in the following manner in 1892 :

> "To say that the Belgachhia Theatre scored a brilliant success is to repeat truism that has passed into a proverb. It achieved a success

unparalleled in the annals of Amateur Theatricals in this country. The graceful stage, the superb sceneries, the stirring Orchestra, the dresses, the costly appurtenances, the splendid get up of the whole concern were worthy of the brother Rajas and the genius of their intimate friend Maharaja Sir Jatindra Mohan Tagore, an accomplished connoisseur. The performance of a single play, *Ratnāvalī*, which alone cost the Rajas *ten thousand rupees*, realised the idea, and established the character of the real Hindu drama with the improvements suited to the taste of an advanced age".

The *Hindu Patriot* of the time also wrote about it in the following way* :

"The characters were so nicely balanced; the tone, the gesture and what is called dramatic action were so clever and consistent, and the counterfeit of passions so natural and life-like that we little expected so much excellence at the outset of a dramatic company. Indeed from first to last, stage was all action and animation and the audience was all attention. The drama, though not without some merits, is not much to our taste...but superior talent of the amateurs made amends for the feebleness of the play."

Babu Sriram Chatterjee, a distinguished scholar of the Hindu College, wrote after seeing the performance :

"It can be said without contradiction that the stage

* H. P. 5th August, 1858.

presented the appearance of Indra's palace. The whole audience was so charmed beyond measure that even myself, however cynical in many matters, remained entranced, as it were."*

The elite of the town was present and amongst others were noticed Sir Frederick Halliday, Mr. Hume, Mr. Goodive Chakraberty, Kali Krishna Bahadur, Ramgopal Ghose, Peari Chand Mitter, Kisori Chand Mitter, Ramnarain Tarkaratna, the Judges and Magistrates of Calcutta and other higher officials and non-officials.†

Most of the actors later in life occupied high status in society and the cast was distributed as follows :

Rājā Udayan ...	Preonath Dutt, afterwards Asst. Controller General.
Vasantaka (jester) ...	Keshav Chandra Ganguly, afterwards Superintendent, Controller General's office.
Romanvān (general) ...	Raja Iswar Chandra Singh.
Yaugandharāyaṇa (minister)	Babu Gaurdas Bysak, Deputy Magistrate, next Deonath Ghosh, Officer Finance Department and a Ray Bahadur.
Vābhravya ...	Nabin Chandra Mukherjee.

* *Madhu's Biograhy.*

† *Prabhākar*, 4th Aug, 1858.

Bahubhūti	...	Girish Chandra Chatterjee.
Vāsavadattā	...	Mahendra Nath Goswami.
Ratnāvalī	...	Hem Chandra Mukherjee.
Susaṅgatā	...	Aghore Chandra Digharia.
Bājīkar (magician)	...	Srinath Sen.
Darwan	...	Jadu Nath Ghose.
Sūtradhār	...	Kshetra Mohan Goswami.
Copdārs	...	Dwaraka Nath Mullick and Krishna Gopal Ghose.
Naṭī	...	Ramnath Laha.
Dancers	...	Kalidas Sanyal and Kali Prasanna Banerjee.
Kāñcanamālā	...	A Brahmin from Serampore.
Music Master	...	Maharaja, Jatindra Mohan.
Concert	...	Kshetra Mohan Pal and Jadunath Goswami, the famous musicians of Bengal.*

Besides Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitra, Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagore, Ramaprasad Roy, Vakil (who was the first Indian Judge of the High Court but died before taking his seat), Dwarakanath Mullick of Pataldanga, Tara Charan Guha of Hogal Kuria and other persons of lead and light, used to take a keen interest for the success of the performance.

* Mr. J. N. Basu's book, p. 223.

As to how the artists acquitted themselves in their respective rôles, we should better quote the words of Babu Gaurdas Bysak*:

"The dramatic corps was drawn from the flower of our educated youth. Among the actors, Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly stood pre-eminent.

Endowed by nature with histrionic talent of no mean order, he represented the *Vidūṣaka* (jester) with such life-like reality, and so rich a fund of humour as to be styled the "Garrick of our Bengali Stage." Raja Iswar Chandra Singh, who looked a prince every inch, encased in mail-coat armour, with a jewelled sword hanging by his side, acted his part, with wonderful effect, befitting the character of a generalissimo. *Sāgārikā*, the sea-rescued heroine depicted in the play as a maiden of exemplary patience under suffering, extreme modesty and a heart tender and susceptible to the influence of love was represented by an intelligent Brahmin lad, whose musical voice enchanted the audience. The queen Vāsavadattā who is most queenly in her character had her part admirably acted by a handsome young lad Mahendra Nath Goswami even to the line in the original—"Resigns all hope of life which is now unbearable". The scene in which the magician (Srinath Sen) set fire to the house of Raja Udayana, king of Kashmir, by means of his wand

**Madhusudan's Biography* by J. N. Bose, p. 223.

and incantations *(mantras)* and the flashes of light that were produced by storntium red fire (then quite a rare and novel substance here) as well as the scene in which the full moon rose behind the plantain grove, were so affectingly enacted as to rivet the wonder and admiration of the audience. The manner in which the other actors, one and all, acquitted themselves met with the warmest applause from the audience—an audience composed of the elite of Calcutta, the cream of European and native society. Eminent Government officials and high non-official gentlemen who witnessed the performances spoke of "exquisite treat" they had enjoyed as heightening their idea of our Indian music and of our Indian stage. The Lieutenant Governor, Sir Frederick Halliday, who was present with his family, was so delighted with acting of Babu Keshav Chandra that he complimented him on his extraordinary dramatic talents. He said that looking at his serious and sedate appearance one could hardly believe him capable of acting so capitally the part of the Jester.*

So eager were the people to see the performance that on one occasion a certain wealthy gentleman of Calcutta unable to obtain an invitation from the Rajas offered even a hundred rupees or more for the

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* Jogendra Nath Bose's Biography of Michael M. S. Dutt in Bengali, p. 648-49, 3rd. Edition.

purchase of a single ticket. It was something preposterous, no doubt, but it showed the eagerness evinced by the people to witness the performance of Belgachhia amateurs.

Babu Kisori Chand Mitra also wrote in the *Calcutta Review* about Keshav, thus :

"The part of the king and Ratnāvalī were performed by youngmen, who acquitted themselves most creditably in their situation which were eminently dramatic but the gem of the actors was Vasantaka, who was represented by Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly. His ready wit, his brilliant bonmots, inimitable comic humour may fairly entitle him to the praise of being the best actor in Bengal. He kept up the interest of the play most successfully and was the life and soul of the performance. The performance was a great success."

Michael Madhusudan Dutt, who was most intimately associated with this Theatre dedicated afterwards his drama *Kṛṣṇakumārī* to Keshav Chandra, whom he called "The first actor of the age".

Now let us see how far did the outside opinion accept the performance. The *Hindu Patriot* of the 5th August, 1858 thus writes :

> "We most willingly call to notice the excellent performance of the character of *Ratnāvalī*, the heroine of the play...
> The passions, the emotions were so vividly

depicted that we scarcely believe, there was one among the audience upon whom these did not make an impression and such as is not likely soon to wear away. The part of the king did not want in dignity, in earnestness or in depth and if, as we have heard some friends remark, his lament over the sufferings of his love was too theatrical and the action therein exceeding the language of his grief, we must absolve him from all blame, who was too knowing not to know the measure of the lament. For sooth the passion was wrought up to so high a pitch that less earnestness would have become indecorous; the defect was that the plot of the play was not fully developed to give nature adequate scope for action. Union is not only strength but beauty ; this was remarkably illustrated in the conjoint action of the King and Ratnāvalī, both when the latter reduced to the last point of despair was about to transmigrate herself to the other world, where there would be no grief and disappointment and when she was surprised to see the king come to her rescue when the apartments of her confinement were in flames. Then the king snatching his dearest love, as it were, from the grasp of grim Death—Ratnāvalī falling senseless with all the tranquil beauty of such an hour on the arms of her lover—His Kingship's awakening her to sense with gentle strokes of affections, and her gradually regaining life and strength the confused interchange and intermingling of affections—Oh! it was Exquisite, Exquisite. It brought tears to many eyes,

we shall never foget it. There was then the King's jester it. The character kept the audience in incessant laughter and nothing could be finer and more amusing than the joy, hilarity what we may call verbose delight and penitent wonder which were specially called forth during the little interleaned comedies of errors which perpetually animated the conversations and witticisms of Vasantaka. There was so much worldliness mixed up with pleasantry in this character that it required consummate mastery of human nature and thorough knowledge of the world which we are happy to say, the amateur displayed to admiration. The interest of the performance of the part was so great that the jester was the special favourite of the night's audience. Susaṅgatā the queen's maid also Ratnāvalī's friend was pretty well in keeping with her part and the artless cunning with which she superintended the first two visits of the king with his love, was characteristic. The queen's part was somewhat wanting in queenliness but the moral control which she held over the king was so inexorably exercised that an exemplary husband told us in confidence nothing could be more true to nature. The story of the ship-wreck related by the minister of the King of Ceylon was well described. The personal bearings of some of the characters were particularly striking as those of King Vijay Varmā and Ratnāvalī."

Another special feature of the theatre was the introduction of the national Orchestra on the basis

of Indian instruments and it was Raja Jatindra Mohan, who suggested this. The concert was played under the direction of Professor Kshetra Mohan Goswami, a genius in music and Babu Jadunath Pal led the band. Gosain for the first time put into notation some of the native tunes and rāgas and thus was the first Concert Band in Bengal formed. Babu Gurudayal Chaudhury disciple of the poet Iswar Gupta composed songs for the purpose.*

Indeed, the music had so powerful and beneficial an effect upon the English gentlemen that one of them to whom the Anglo India Drama and Music owe more than to any other English resident in India, remarked that it completely neutralised in his mind the prejudices which he had conceived against tho Hindu music. The airs complacently preserved the oriental character of the occasion.

As to dancing, the *Patriot* observes :

> "We were, however, not a little surprised with the nice dancing which we witnessed. At first we mistook the dancers who played so wonderfully for nautch girls until we were disabused of our impression by authentic evidence. Indeed, they trimmed over the stage ground so lightly and moved briskly that one not behind the scenes could scarcely forego the above conclusion."

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* 1. Gaurdas Bysak's reminisences.

2. Kisori Chand Mitter's article.

Then at the suggestion of his friend Babu Gaurdas Bysak, Madhusudan was engaged by the Rajas to translate the play for the convenience of spectators, who could not understand Bengali. The translation was a masterpiece and few Englishmen, said the *Harkara*, could have written so chaste and beautiful English.

In this permanent stage of Belgachhia, *Ratnāvalī* alone was performed twelve nights, and this would not have been possible if the stage was a temporary one. Indeed, Belgachhia permanent Theatre marked a new era in the history of the Bengali Stage. It acted as a first great stimulus and henceforth theatres were started all over the country. The organisers have left a history behind and no greater compliment is possible than what was paid by Michael Madhusudan Dutt in the following words :

*"Should the drama ever again flourish in India, posterity will not forget those noble gentlemen, the earliest friends of our rising National Theatre."**

Our readers will remember that the idea of a *National Theatre* came first from Madhu Sudan.

II. SARMISHTHA.

Ratnāvalī was followed by *Śarmiṣṭhā* written for the aforesaid theatre by Michael Madhusudan

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* Preface to *Śarmiṣṭhā.*

Dutt, who, when Sāgarikā *(Ratnāvalī)* was losing attraction by repetition, came to the rescue with his first Bengali production. But the question is how could a Bengali drama come out from the pen of the Anglicised Bengali, who found it difficult even to spell the simple Bengali word *Pṛthivī* meaning the earth, rather prided in mis-spelling the word, confidently remarking to his friend Bhudev Mukherjee, that it must be *Prathivī* and not *Pṛthivī* ? The solution surely lies in the miracle of his genius more than with anything else.

It is said that when the rehearsal of *Ratnāvalī* had been going on, Madhusudan exclaimed to his friend Gaurdas Bysak, another promoter thereof—"what a pity that the Rajas have spent such a lot of money over a miserable play. I wish I had known of it before, as I could have given you a piece worthy of your theatre". Babu Gaurdas laughed at these presumptuous words, but a genius like Madhusudan was not to be put out by laughter or cold sneer, and within a short space of time he brought to the astonishment of his friends, the above mentioned drama which was successfully acted by the troupe on the 3rd September, 1859. Both Jatindra Mohan Tagore and Raja Iswar Chandra were principal organisers and the former composed some songs including the ode to *Śiva* in the last act of the performance.

The dramatic cast was as follows :

King Yayāti	...	Preonath Dutt. (as his father died, the part of Rājā was performed by Jadunath Chatterjee.)
Mādhavya (Basantaka)	...	Keshav Chandra Ganguly.
Mantrī (minister)	...	Nobin Chandra Mukherjee.
Śukrācārya (Ṛṣi)	...	Dena Nath Ghose.
Kapil (His disciple)	...	Sarat Chandra Ghose, (laterly of the Bengal Theatre).
Bakāsur (General)	...	Iswar Chandra Singh.
Daitya (An officer)	...	Tara Chand Guha.

[As the Raja fell from the back of his horse and his hand fractured, Tara Chand took the part of Bakāsur and his part of Daitya was taken by Nritya Lal Das.]

Citizens	...	Harish Chandra Mukherjee. Rasik Lal Saw. Brono Lal Dutt.
Courtiers	...	Jatindra Mohan Tagore. Rajendra Lal Mitter.
Copdār	...	Dwarkanath Mullick— this part ultimately was taken by Mahesh Chandra Chander.
Darwan	...	Jatindra Ghose, Raja's brother-in-law.
Devajānī	...	Hem Chandra Mukherjee, (Sāgarikā of *Ratnāvalī*).
Śarmiṣṭhā	...	Kristodhone Mukherjee, (a new-comer) a real acquisition.

Pūrṇikā	...	Kalidas Sandel (formerly appeared as a dancing girl).
Devikā	...	Aghore Chandra Digharia (Susaṅgatā).
Naṭa	...	Braja Durlabh Dutta.
Naṭī	...	Chuni Lal Bose (as before).
Maidservant	...	Kali Prasanna Mukherjee.
Dancing girls	...	The same as before plus Bankim Chandra Mukherjee. *

Though Raja Iswar Chandra doubted whether *Śarmiṣṭhā* would be as popular as *Ratnāvalī*, it was indeed a great success and the newspapers of the time spoke highly of the performance.

Madhu, too, was present in the performance and wrote to his friend Babu Rajnarain Bose about its successful representation:

"When *Śarmiṣṭha* was acted at Belgachhia, the impression it created was simply indescribable. Even the least romantic spectator was charmed by the character of *Śarmiṣṭhā* and shed tears with her. As for my own feelings, they were "things to dream of, not to tell". Poor old Ram Chandra (Babu Ram Chandra Mitra, the veteran old teacher of the Hindu College) was

* From a letter, 24th March, 1859 of Raja Iswar Chandra fixing the cast and written to Gaurdas Bysak. *Vide*, *Madhusudan's Biography*, p. 233 by Jogindra Nath Bose.

Vide also *Anuśīlan and Purohit*, *1302*, *Jyaiṣṭha*, *Raṅgabhūmir Itivṛtta*.

half mad and grasped my hand saying "why, dear Madhu, my dear Madhu, this does you great credit indeed ; Oh, it is beautiful."

How the enlightened public appreciated the performance, will be evident from the review in the *Hindu Patriot* (September 10, 1859) :

"The period of the drama transports us back to Indian society as it was two thousand yeas ago and we are glad to state that the scenic arrangements and the accoutrements of the corps dramatique pictured forth with a marvellous accuracy the India life, habitudes and usages of the distant age. Our antiquarian friends present on the occasion bore cheerful testimony to their accuracy. The *habitements* of the Sage Śukrācārya flowing from neck to foot tinged with mud green colour approximating in sombreness to the covering sheet of an Egyptian Mummy adoring the Calcutta Asiatic Museum, and withal beautifully attesting to the austere life of the Ṛṣi, in marked contrast to the costume of our capuchins of the present day were an object of particular admiration to them. The court was splendidly represented, the courtiers observing a fidelity of manner and bearing, which, those, who accuse our countrymen of deficiency in either, ought to have witnessed to disabuse themselves of their erroneous ideas.

The performance, we are happy to be able to remark, was not charged with any appreciable exaggeration. A free and full scope was afford-

> ed to nature and if the outset wanted a little in life and animation, it was more than compensated for by the unusually exciting interest, which the play created as it neared the conclusion. This time, as on the past occasion, the jester was the soul of the corps. The genial play of his fancy, his exquisite humour and his frolics, his appropriate apothegems unobstrusively introduced in the midst of quiet laughter, and his merry consideration of self, undisguised and always enlivening were always welcome and often exciting. There was so much freedom, life, grace and nature about him that we can boldly declare, he will do equal justice to the Boards of Paris or London. The other characters comported themselves as agreeably to the audience as creditably to themselves. They were particularly observant of decorum, seldom transgressing the modesty of nature."

Śarmiṣṭhā is important from other points of view also. It marks the epoch when Bengali Dramas began to just come into being. Madhusudan also introduced some innovations and was practically the pioneer to secede from the old Sanskrit school of drama. *Bhadrārjun* was rather too insignificant a drama to draw any notice of the people, and we have also seen Kaliprasanna Sinha was gradually receding from the old model, but it was Madhusudan, who gave the last blow. From the very beginning Madhusudan tried to discard old Sanskrit models and classical conventions. In the preface to the

translation of *Ratnāvalī* Madhusudan wrote "A host of writers, who will discard Sanskrit Models and look to higher sources for inspiration."

Mahamahopadhyaya Premchand Tarkavagish, the famous Sanskritist of that time, going through the manuscript copy of Madhusudan's *Śarmiṣṭhā* remarked, "It is no drama, perhaps it is the production of a young Babu having a knowledge of English ; any corrections made would necessitate the change of the look as a whole." Madhu, on the other hand, required no help from a Sanskrit dramatist and wanted to stand or fall by himself. Thus he writes to his friend Gaurdas Bysak :

"I am aware, my dear fellow, that there will, in all likelihood, be something of a foreign air about my drama and that it is my intention to throw off the fetters forged for us by a servile taste of everything Sanskrit."

Madhu, however, could not shake himself off from all the old technique and formalities, but taking everything into consideration, Madhusudan may be considered to be the pioneer showing a new path, which was henceforth to be followed by later dramatists.

The opening song was composed by Madhusudan. It throws a light on his attitude of mind then uppermost in him, to see dramatic art reaching a high standard of moral excellence and it also gives a

hint about the low standard of dramatic literature then prevalent. Thus it runs :

"O, mother India, how long will you remain in slumber? There was a time when dramatic art was in ascendency in India but it is almost dead now. Where are the poets Vālmīki, Vyāsa Kālidāsa and Bhavabhūti? I cannot bear the sight of the sons of Bengal being charmed by dramas of evil taste. They drink poison, leaving aside nectar. I invoke thee, oh mother, to awake and enthuse good taste in them."*

Śarmiṣṭhā really put Madhu at the head of the Bengali authors and it was considered by the

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Mari hāy kothā se sukher samay,
Ye samay, deśamay, nāṭyaras saviśeṣ chila
rasamay.

Sona go bhāratabhūmi kata nidrā yāve tumi,
Ār nidrā ucit nā hay.
Uṭha tyaja ghumaghor, haila haila bhor,
Dinakar prācīte uday.
Kothāy Vālmīki Vyās, kothā tava Kālidāsa,
Kothā Bhavabhūti mahoday.
Alīk kunāṭyaraṅge, maje loka Rāḍhe Vaṅge
Nirakhiyā prāṇe nāhi say.
Sudhārasa anādare, Viṣavāri pāṇa kare,
tāhe hay tanu, mana kṣay.
Madhu kahe jāgo mā go, vibhūsthāne ei māgo,
surase pravṛtta ha'k tava tanayanicay.

* Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitra's *Viḥ saṃ. pañcam parva*, *ṣaṃkhyā 58*, *śaka 1780*, *Māgha*,

people of Bengal as the *best Bengali drama,* hitherto published in Bengali.

Madhu himself wrote out a translation of the same for the English-speaking audience.

The last performance of *Śarmiṣṭhā* in the Belgachhia Theatre was on September 22, 1859 as was noticed in the *Bengal Harkara* of Tuesday, September 29, 1859 :

> "The *Śarmiṣṭhā* was performed for the last time, we understand, before the holidays on Tuesday evening last, at the little private Theatre...... Among the company were present The Hon'ble Sir J. P. Grant, Lt. Governor of Bengal, Mr. & Mrs. J. P. Grant Junior, Dr. and Mrs, McPherson, Major Plowden, Private Secretary to Lieutenant Governor, Mr. C. Piffard and Mr. H. P. Hinde of the Supreme Court Bar, Mr. Site Apcar, Moonshi Ameerali of Patna notoriety, Babu Rajendra Lala Mitter, a numerous and fashionable audience from the depot at Dum Dum and many other native and European gentlemen."

The above plays *Kulīnkulasarvasva, Śakuntalā, Ratnāvalī* and *Śarmiṣṭhā* inaugurated a new epoch in the history of the dramatic literature in Bengal, about which Rev. J. Long did not forget to mention in his report to the Government of Bengal in 1859, in following words :

"A taste for Dramatic Exhibition has lately

revived among the educated Hindus, who find that translations of the Ancient Hindu Dramas are more valuable than translations from English Plays.…

Foremost among the persons of the Drama are Raja Pratap Chander Singh and a young Zeminder Kali Prasanna Singh."

Madhusudan's second drama was *Padmāvatī* written after the Great legends. Its Śacī, Ratī, Nārada, Rājā Indranil and the princess Padmāvatī are copied from the Greek Juno, Venus, Discordia, Paris and Helen of Homer's Illiad, with of course some difference in representation of art and character in a way characteristic of Madhu's genius. Madhu expected it to be staged at the Belgachhia, but it could not be so done.

Madhusudan next wrote the two farcical comedies *Eke i ki Bale Sabhyatā* (Is this civilization) and *Buruśaliker Ghāre Row* in the same year, i. e., in 1860. The former exposes the habits of *Young Bengal* and the latter mercilessly does of the hypocrites, who put on a sanctimonious air. Most of these religious frauds like *Bhaktaprasād* of the latter farce are really licentious and avaricious.

As to Madhusudan's dramas, opinion is divided, but the farces have been very highly spoken of by all classes of people including even the most fastidious critic. We quote below the observations of

a writer, who is thought by some people as the renowned Bankim Chandra Chatterjee that appeared in the *Calcutta Review* of 1871 (Vol. 52) in the name of Babu Haramohan Mukherjee :

"As a dramatist Mr. Dutt is not successful. Among his plays are *Śarmiṣṭhā*, *Padmāvatī* and *Kṛṣṇa-kumārī* and the first mentioned in particular is very generally admired. In our judgments none of them are of much value and his undoubted poetic genius seems to divert him as soon as he sets about writing a play. His farces, however, are good, one of them entitled, *Is this civilization* is best in the language. This little work deserves notice independently of its great merit. The Bengali Press at the present day is very prolific, but by far the largest part of the books published are mere servile imitations of some successful author. There are imitations of Vidyasagore, imitations of Tek Chand Thakur, of Dina Bandu Mitra, of the author of *Durgeś-nandinī*, but perhaps no work has formed the model for so many imitators as *Is this civilization*. It is a farce with a purpose being intended chiefly to ridicule and so expose the vice of drunkenness and other evils by which it is generally attended.

This little work, therefore, independently of its being in itself one of the best farces in the language joins the additional importance from the large number of other books written after its model.

To give an adequate idea of this clever little work by translated extracts would be entirely im-

possible, because half the fun lies in the absurd Jargon interlaced with English words and the cant of debating clubs in which the characters speak. The scene is laid in the *Jñāna-taraṅgiṇī Sabhā*, a sort of scientific debating society, which chiefly devoted itself to nautch girls and tippling. The types of life and character, which it represents, are sufficiently disgusting and the important question is whether representation is correct.

To the shame of Bengal we must say that we fear the picture is a true one.

The reformer, who never gets beyond tipsy, harangues full of English expressions, should not be confounded, as he often is, by Europeans with the really civilised class. But it cannot be denied that he is a fair representation of the great horde of partly educated Babus, whose only claim to enlightenment lies in the fact that they drink, wear shabby trousers and stammer out barbarous English. These are the men, who swarm in every office and plague officials with endless applications for employment, crowd the thoroughfares of the native town in the evening, drain the liquor-shops and form the majority of his audience when Babu Keshav Chandra Sen lectures in the Town Hall. Of education they have had nothing worth the name. Having spent a few years very profitably in learning smattering of English at home or Anglo-vernacular school, they started in life, if poor, at the age of eighteen as *umedwars*, if rich, they

devoted themselves from the same age with their whole strength to swinish pleasures. The country is over-run with men of this sort and Mr. Dutt's picture is true in life ; but they must not be confounded with the really cultivated class, who, inspitc of all that has been said regarding the spread of English education, are comparatively few in number.

The other farce also describes the vices of a man who poses as a pious man but was a debauch within."

The above review appeared during the lifetime of Madhusudan, and so far as the farces are concerned the above remarks are justly true ; but as regards the dramas, we humbly differ. Madhu's dramas did not find recognition in the first stage, as the Sanskrit school of critics (by far the largest at the time) found him a renegade from the established school of dramas and the Bankim school wanted a dramatist of a higher standard like Marlow or Shakespeare and as Madhu could not satisfy either class, he had few friends to admire him though his dramas, especially *Kṛṣnakumārī,* had much of dramatic excellence in them. Indeed, Madhusudan was the pioneer and may very well be considered as the best of the dramatists of the earliest history of Bengali dramas.

Is this civilization was also very highly spoken of by the *Hindu Patriot,* July 31, 1856 *:*

"This farce is undoubtedly one of the happiest reproductions of the fertile brain of the gifted poet. It is a life-like picture of Young Bengal full of sallies of wit and humour and written in familiar graceful Bengali."

Now as to why these farces, though written for the Belgachhia Theatre, could not be acted there, we would better quote from the reminiscences of Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly about Madhusudan. The following account, taken from the *Biography* of the poet, will greatly interest our readers :*

"After the farces were written by Madhusudan for the Belgachhia Theatre and were subsequently printed at the expense of the Rajas of Paikpara and the characters were cast, the rehearsals commenced. But an adverse circumstance occured, which prevented their being brought on the stage.

"A few of the young Bengal class getting a scent of the farce "*Eke i ki Bale Sabhyatā* and seeing that the caricature made in it touched them too closely, raised a hue and cry and choosing for their leader a gentleman of position and influence, who, they knew, had some influence with the Rajas deputed him to dissuade them from producing the farce on the Board of the Theatre. This gentleman (also a young Bengal) fought tooth and nail for the success of his mission."

* Madhusudan's *Biography*, 2nd Edition, p. 32-33, *Pariśiṣṭa*.

"The Rajas would not yield at first, but under great pressure were obliged to give up the farce. Raja Iswar Chandra Singh was so disgusted at this affair that he resolved not only to give up the other farce, but to have no more Bengali plays acted at the Belgachhia Theatre. This circumstance was not known to our friend Michael, who pestered me with repeated enquiries, why the farces were not taken up in earnest by the Belgachhia Dramatic Corps. Is it because we think that they were not well written. I could only give him an evasive reply saying that as one farce exposes the faults and failings of *Young Bengal* and the other, those of the old Hindus, and as the Rajas were popular with both the classes, they did not wish to offend either class by having them acted in theatre. The above incident however, so much disgusted Raja Iswar Chandra that he made every representation for having some English farces acted on the Boards of the Belgachhia Theatre.* And rehearsals actually commenced with the Raja himself, Dr. Rajendra Lala Mitter, Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly, Babu Dinanath Ghose and others, but as Babu Jatindra Mohan Tagore was opposed to the acting of English plays or farces on the Boards of the Bengali Theatre, the project fell through and the theatre was practically suspended."

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* Jatindra Mohan in a letter, dated 22nd May, 1860, writes to Madhu saying, "I am led to believe that the Rajas will have no more Bengali plays at the Belgachhia." *Michael's Biography, page 266.*

Madhu next composed a drama *Subhadrā*, which he did not intend for the stage, as it was simply a dramatic poem. He then culled out his subject from the Pathan History and set upon himself to write a piece under the name of *Rezia*, daughter of King Altamash of the Slave Dynasty, as he thought, "Mahomedans are a fiercer race than ourselves and would afford splendid opportunity for the display of passion," and sent a synopsis of the play to Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly, Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore and Raja Iswar Chandra Singh for consideration if it could be acted at the Belgachhia Theatre. They, however, thought that Mahomedan names would not hear well in a Bengali drama and too many female characters therein could not be well represented. Keshav, however, thought, the history of the Rajputs would afford materials for a proper drama. Madhu took the subject in right earnest and within a space of *one month's time from August 6 to September 7, 1860,* finished his drama *Kṛṣṇa-kumārī.* This book, as we have seen, was dedicated to Keshav Chandra Ganguly.

Madhu wanted it, as he said, his heart was set upon seeing it, to be acted at Belgachhia. He wanted Mr. Ganguly to see the Chhota Raja (Raja Iswar Chandra) with Dinonath and Jatindra Mohan and mildly threatened saying, "Mind, you all broke my wings once about the farces ; if you play a similar

trick this time, I shall forswear Bengali and write books in Hebrew or Chinese."

But Raja Iswar Chandra was unmovable partly for his illness and partly for the previous disappointment and the theatre soon became the "abode of Bats". In vain Madhusudan tried for its revival and in a letter to Mr. Ganguly he wrote:

"It strikes me, that if the Drama is to be acted as it has not received even a moderate degree of development in this country, you had better at once organise your company and begin operations with the two acts printed. Go on rehearsing at Jatindra's and then you can settle whether we are to do the thing in the Town Theatre or blaze out at dear old Belgachhia—1 vote for Belgachhia."

Madhu also selected the cast putting the rôle of Dhanadās in the hands of Keshav, but he was sorry to find as he wrote, "I am afraid, brother Keshav, we are losing that fine enthusiasm we once had in matters dramatic" and was stirring his friend in the words,—"If the Rajas of Paikpara are bent upon shutting their doors against Sarasvatī, I hope, the poor Goddess will still find a warm friend in Babu Jatindra Mohan Tagore."

But alas! the continued illness and the sad and untimely death of Raja Iswar Chandra, a prince amongst men, on the 29th March, 1861, put an end to the project for ever. The Belgachhia, the first

permanent stage of Bengal, was thus broken up, leaving its memory for good. There is no trace of the stage now, but the memories of Raja brothers, Jatindra Mohan Tagore, Keshav Chandra Ganguly, above all, Madhusudan Dutt and his farce, *Is this civilization*, written for it, will ever remain fresh in the minds of every Bengalee, so long as civilization remains with us.

The songs of *Kṛṣṇakumārī* were composed by Maharaja Jatindra Mohan, who, on this occasion as before, bore the cost of printing the drama. This is the first Bengali tragedy in the dramatic literature of Bengal and the *Hindu Patriot* of February 1867, writes thus :

> "This is the best and original drama in the Bengali language familiar with the richest treasures of the dramatic Literature of Europe and India. Our author had enriched his mother tongue with a production, which would bear comparison with the first class dramas of the ancient and modern classics. Written in chaste Bengali with a plot admirably developed, the characters beautifully fitting into each other and possessed of an antique grandeur, *Kṛṣṇakumārī* if it had not been stamped with imprint of a modern press and name of a modern writer, would have passed as one of those master-productions of poetic genius, which have won for ancient India such an eminent place in the republic of letters."

This is not the place to criticise about the Dramatic merits of Madhusudan's genius, but it is undeniable that his pen produced the first successful Paurāṇik Drama,* the first tragedy, the first historical drama and as a social sketch the first farce that has remained unsurpassed by any writer even until this day and it is he, who dreamt for National Theatre, hoped for it and before his death saw its birth and wrote dramas for it. So long as Bengali Drama and Theatre will have its history, Madhusudan's name will ever be remembered with sincere gratefulness by his countrymen.

Rev. KESHAV CHANDRA ON THE STAGE

Drama exercised such a fascination over the country that almost all her gifted sons took an active interest in it, and of them Rev. Keshav Chandra Sen, the illustrious preacher, was one. The name of Keshav is a bye-word amongst the educated Bengalees for his great oratorial powers, superb eloquence and the supreme gifts of carrying everything before him, like whom Europe has scarcely seen a dozen of preachers since the spread of Christianity in the west. In his student days, Keshav was a great lover of drama, who, with his friend and associate Rev. Brother Pratap Chandra Mazumder, a great orator (to those orations America bore many

* We have already mentioned about *Bhadrārjun Nāṭak.*

eloquent testimonies of appreciation and praise) and Babu Narendra Nath Sen (afterwards the famous editor of the Indian Mirror, who never faltered to speak the truth face to face even to an angry Viceroy) figured as Hamlet, Leartes and Ophelia respectively in the performance of *Hemlet*, in English at their native village Garifa. This was in 1857 or thereabout, when *Śakuntalā* and other Bengali dramas were being staged.

The other parts were represented as follows :

Horatio	...	Akshay Kumar Mazumder.
Polinius	...	Bhola Nath Chakraverty.
Barnardo	...	Jogendra Nath Sen.
King	...	Mahendra Nath Sen.
Queen	...	Nanda Lal Das.

An interesting and faithful account of the performance may be gathered from the well known book, "Life and teachings of Keshav Chandra Sen" by Rev. Pratap Chandra Mazumder, p. 101-102 :

> "A stage was improvised, castway—European clothes were speedily procured from the bearers and we painted our faces as best as we could. Keshav played Hamlet most successfully, he had the constitution of the Danish Prince by nature. The present writer took the part of Leartes, while Narendra Nath Sen, who had thin girlish voice at the time, played Ophelia very feelingly. Considering our age and training, the performance was successful. We kept up the play

> from time to time, till Keshav's theatrical propensities developed into the *Vidhavāvivāha Nāṭak*, a little while afterwards."

As to the performance of the second drama *Vidhavā-vivāha Nāṭak*, the same writer gives an interesting and faithful account as follows in pages 114-16 of his book :

> "In the splendid building at Chitpore Road to which the Brahma School was removed in 1859, Keshav found a somewhat unexpected occupation. He was entrusted with the management of an institution very different from the Brahma School. It was a Dramatic Club to put on the stage *Vidhavābivāha Nāṭak* (Widow-marriage Drama) written with the object of reforming the cruel custom of the forced celibacy of young Hindu widows. By repeated representation of Hamlet and other performances half musical, half dramatic, Keshav had developed such a talent for stage management that the gentlemen, who projected this company, most of them our relatives and neighbours, senior to us in age, implicitly trusted Keshav with the sole charge of the new undertaking. Keshav's love for Shakespeare and for good dramas in general was unbounded, it was one of those dispositions, which his early asceticism never wholly effaced, strange as that may seem and which adhered to him till the last day of his life.

> He always looked upon dramatic representation not only as a most enlightened form of public

amusement but also as a most potent agency for the reformation of social evils. Abstemious in his own personal habits, he never grudged to the community its legitimate share of rational recreation. Natural innocent joyousness he held to be the safety-valve of a hundred ill-humours in the human mind also as a great force by which an individual and a nation might be raised to the most exalted ideals. To all these motives were added the intense sympathy he felt with the marriage of Hindu widows. Since the inaugeration of the widow marriage reform in 1856,* Keshav, though then a very young man, wished well to the cause and did what he could do to contribute to its success. He, therefore, cheerfully accepted the management of the Widow marriage Drama. Four institutions now ran abreast each other under Keshav's supervision. There was the Colootola Evening School, the Good Will Fraternity, the Brahma School and the Theatre at Chitpore Road. As nearly the same individuals comprised the staff of them all, it was sometimes amusing and perplexing to hear the several bells ring almost simultaneously for the classes of the first, the services of the second, lectures of the third and rehearsals of the fourth.

The plot of the drama was the miserable life of a

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* In 1855, a society for the reformation of Hindu customs with Kisori Chand Mitter as secretary was formed, where Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagore now and then used to read pamphlets.

Hindu widow, shut in the Zenana, who, in her solitary friendless condition, formed an attachment to a young neighbour by whom she was led to course of sin. The concluding scenes depicted her sufferings, her suicide, her confessions with appeals to all patriotic men, to put an end to the forced celibacy of Hindu widows. The performance was first opened to the public in the beginning of 1859 and produced a sensation in Calcutta, which, those, who witnessed it, can never forget. The representatives of the highest classes of Hindu society were present. The pioneer and father of the widow marriage movement Pandit Iswar came more than once, and tender-hearted as he was, was moved to floods of tears. In fact, there was scarcely a dry eye in the great audience: undoubtedly the most wholesome effect was produced. Keshav, as stage manager, was warmly complimented on his energy and intelligence and we, his friends, as amateur actors, who had done our best, also received our humble share of praise, Though his dramatic success brought Keshav a good deal before the public in that dawn and flash of his spiritual character, the occupation of a stage manager could not but soon grow uncongenial. He and his companions were often thrown into heterogenous company; some of the parts played were undoubtedly harmful in their moral tendency; there was inevitable dissipation, frivolity and a dangerous love of public applause. So before the end of the year the

Theatre was given up completely and Keshav turned his attention to more serious and important subjects."

The drama in Bengali was from the pen of late Babu Umesh Chandra Mitra, who treated the social question admirably * and the place of its performance was at Sinduria Pati (Chitpore Road) near Canning Street at the house of Babu Gopal Lal Mullick. The Theatre was called the Metropolitan Theatre after the name of the Hindu Metropolitan College, which had been located here.† The first performance was on the 23rd June, 1858.

The *Hurkara* ‡ gives an account that on April 27, 1859, the audience numbered 500 persons, performance commencing at 8 p.m. and closed at 3 a.m. and the part performed by a Tol Pandit, Tarkālaṅkār and by Sukhamayī, elicited most admiration and that the stage scenes were well got up, and that thanks were due to the proprietor Muralidhar Sen.

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* *Citizen, June 26, 1859.*

† It is now at the Samkar Ghose Lane, under the name of the Vidyasagar College.

‡ Another drama of a similar nature with *Vidhavā-udvāha Nāṭak* was to be acted in the northern part of the town at Kansaripara in the house of a Bania, Manindra Lal Bose, *Bengal Hurkara*, May 21, 1857.

The cast as follows :

Kīrtirām Ghoṣ	...	Mahendra Nath Sen.
Manmatha	...	Rev. Pratap Chandra Mazumdar.
Rāma Kānta	...	Prof. Krishna Bihari Sen (brother of Keshav Chandra Sen).
Guru Mahāśaya	...	Haran Chandra Mazumdar.
Rāmdev	...	Akshay Chandra Mazumdar.
Bridegroom	...	Yadav Chandra Roy.
Sulocanā	...	Behari Lal Chatterjee.
Padmāvatī	...	Gopal Chandra Sen.
Daughter - in - law of Sukhamayī	...	Narendra Nath Sen.
Rasavatī	...	Rakhal Chandra Sen.

The part of Sulocanā was so splendidly done that the people doubted whether the part was really acted by a man or a woman, but *Hurkara* hoped that female parts should be represented by persons of that sex.

It is said that songs composed by Dwaraka Nath Roy were set to tune by Babu Radhika Prasad Dutt,* who composed the concert along with Umesh Bhadra, Kshetra Bose, Panchanan Mitra, Gadadhar Mitra, Rasik Mukherjee and Beni Madhav Bose.

We have another social drama under the name of *Nava Vṛndāvan* under the auspices of Keshav

* *Prabhākara*, 14th May, 1859.

Chandra Sen, in the name of Chiranjiv Sarma (Trailokya Nath Sanyal). Keshav Babu is said to have taken the part of *Pāhārī Vāvā*. This drama has often been acted and the last performance, we saw, was at the Victoria Institution in 1916, when Babu Dines Chandra Das, now an important figure in 'Talkies', took the part of Avināś and Mr. S. Sen (son of Keshav Babu) that of Pāhāri Vāvā. *Indian Mirror* also reports about an earlier performance of the drama, in 1882. † The play must have commenced long before that.

† *Indian Mirror*, 23rd September, 1882.

Chapter IV

DINABANDHU ERA

AND

The East Bengal Stage

Next, we shall speak about a drama, which brought about a great national awakening in the province. The drama was the well known piece *Nīladarpaṇa* and the dramatist was no other person than the great Dinabandhu Mitra, the period of whose domineering influence as the dramatist, was known as the *Dinabandhu Era.* The performance of the *Nīladarpaṇa Nāṭak* was a memorable incident in the history and development of the Bengali Stage. The honour of frequently staging the drama and thereby exposing to the public high-handedness of the oppressive Indigo planters belonged, however, to The "East Bengal Stage", *Pūrvavaṅga-Raṅgabhūmi* of Dacca, which greatly helped the cause of national agitation that shook then the province of Bengal from one end to the other. It is, however, providential that the first national drama by Dinabandhu (friend of the poor) was staged in the native district of the great national leader Deśabandhu, or the friend of the country.

It was about the time of the Sepoy mutiny that the oppression of the Indigo planters reached its climax and in the words of Rev. James Long "a reign of terror existed." An Indigo commission was appointed by Sir J. P. Grant, Lt. Governor, in 1860 with Mr. W. S. Seaton Karr as Secretary, to enquire into the grievances of the ryots (Prajā) and the great patriotic editor Babu Harish Chandra Mukherjee rendered invaluable services by writing columns after columns every day about the inhuman oppression of the planters. It was at this time, in September, 1860, Dinabandhu exhibited in graphic colours the horrors of the planters' oppression over the helpless ryots of Bengal, how the poor peasantry was being cruelly ground every day under that heartless system. His drama was, in fact, the Mirror, as its name *Darpaṇa* signifies, that held up the full reflection of the oppression and tortures practised by the haughty and defiant planters. Dinabandhu did not dare to subscribe his name as the author, but the book read as being "written by a certain traveller for the good of ryots, suffering from the bite of the Cobra de capello in the form of the Indigo planter."*

The author's experiences were only reflected in

* The first edition of the book shows that the date of publication was 2nd Āśvin, 1782 (Śaka Era), printed by Ramchandra Bhowmik at Bangala Bazar Dacca Press.

the *Mirror*, as the greatest literary genius of that time, Bankim Chandra, writes : †

"In consequence of Government work he had to travel from Manipore to Ganjam and from Darjeeling to seas…he had to go from village to village…he had extraordinary power of mixing with people and he used to mix gladly with people of all classes. He knew intimately low caste villagers' daughters like Kshetramani, old village women like Aduri, village ryots like Torap, Dewans of Indigo Factory, Amins etc. In *Nīladarpaṇa*, author's experience and sympathy combined in full measure and it was the most powerful of all his dramas….."

Indeed, Kshetramani of the drama was none but Haramoni, a peasant girl of Nuddea in flesh and blood, known as one of the beauties of Krishnagar, who was carried off to the Kulchikatta factory, in charge of Archibald Hills, the Chhota Saheb, where the girl was kept in his bed-room till late hours of the night, and the kind Magistrate of Amarnagore in the drama was no other person than Mr. W. J. Herschel, grandson of the great astronomer and Act XI was nothing but the cruel summary procedure, which Nabin Madhav, a character in the drama, describes as a *cruel Law* and Revati,

† Vide, Biographical sketch of Dinabandhu by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

another character, remarks that under this law, no appeal lies against conviction. ("Pil Hoi nā")*

Mr. R. C. Dutt, I.C.S., C.I.E. also speaks about the drama :†

> "Dinabandhu, who was born in Chamberia village in the Nuddea District, had ample opportunities to note the doings of the planters and their subordinates.
>
> "At last, in 1860, he published his first dramatic work *Nīladarpaṇa* anonymously, bringing together facts and incidents, which had come up to his observation and weaving them into the plot with the skill of a true artist."

Now Dacca, the place of birth of this famous drama, gave quite a befitting representation of this epoch-making play, and its modes and sentiments at once took the country by storm. The *Hurkara* ‡ speaks both about the drama and its performance :

> "Our native friends entertain themselves with occasional theatrical performances and *the Nīladarpaṇa* was acted on one of these occasions."

The effect of the drama and its performance was electrifying and it roused a wave of indignation

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* Indigo Commission Proceedings.

† "The Literature of Bengal," Chapter XVII. Dramatic writers.

‡ *Hurkara*, 12th June, 1861, A correspondent of Dacca.

throughout the length and breadth of the country as the following remarks of the famous scholar, preacher and author, Pandit Shiv Nath Sastri, will show :

"When the celebrated patriot Harish Chandra Mukherjee took up his pen in the *Hindu Patriot*, the planters' Citadel of Sin trembled. When the people's minds were thus excited, then was published Dinabandhu Mitter's celebrated drama *Nīladarpaṇa.* We shall never forget the upheaval which it caused in Bengali society. All of us, children, old men and women, became almost mad. It was the talk in every home and in every lodging was its representation ; Bengal began to quake from one end to the other, as if from the effects of seismic shock. As the result of this great upheaval, the oppression of the Indigo planters vanished for ever from Bengal."*

Nor was the response confined to Bengal alone. There were arrangements for the performance of the drama in Bombay also. So says the *Hindu Patriot* :

"We learn from the *Times of India* that the Editor of the *Bombay Samācār Darpaṇ* has completed arrangements to bring the *Nīladarpaṇa* on the stage of the Grant Road Theatre. Is there no editor

* Vide, Bengali essay *National Awakening* and also *The Indigo Disturbance*—National Literature compiled by Babu Lalit Ch. Mitra.

of the *Englishman* type there to bring the libel-treating Editor to his bearing ?"*

The above refers to the prosecution of Rev. J. Long at the instance of Mr. Walter Brett, editor *Englishman*, for libel, about which we ought to give here a short account.

Several gentlemen of education and position wanted to have the book translated into English for the information of those, who were ignorant of the Bengali language, but who should be acquainted with the true state of national feeling on the subject and Mr. Seaton Karr, Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal, struck with the thorough knowledge of village life, which the drama displayed, gave sanction to the translation of it into English. Rev. James Long had it done through Michael Madhusudan Dutt of *Śarmiṣṭhā* fame, in August 1861 and 500 copies of this translation were sent to the Bengal office and out of these 202 copies were sent to England under official seal, and only 14 copies were circulated in India. Rev. J. Long wrote a very able preface to that translation and published it in his own name.

The landowners and the Commercial Association backed the Indigo planters and Mr. Walter Brett, then Editor of the *Englishman*, who was all along with the Editor of the *Hurkara* "described in

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* *Hindu Patriot*, 5th Sept., 1861.

preface to the drama as having sold themselves for Rs. 1000/- like Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus to the Roman Pontius Pilate for a few pieces of silver coins," at first brought a libel action against the printer Mr. C. H. Manual, who was fined Rs. 10/- by the Supreme Court of Calcutta for his having admitted liability. Then a libel suit was brought against Rev. Long himself. The case was heard at the Criminal Sessions of the Calcutta High Court, presided over by Sir Mordaunt Wells on the 19th July, 1861*. Mr. Long admitted his connection with the work and presented a long statement in justification of his sympathy with the movement, describing therein how the drama was a genuine expression of the popular feeling and the effect of indigo-planting was as ruinous as the drama represented. The Judge, however, went out of his way to denounce both Mr. Long and the work, describing the latter as *foul and disgusting libel.* From the following instance quoted in *the Hurkara* from a passage of *Nīladarpaṇa,* it is curious how he interpreted the facts :

There is a conversation between Dāragā and Zamādār where the former asks :

"Did not the Magistrate say that he will come here this day ?"

* Messrs. Paterson and Cowie appeared for the prosecution, and Messrs. Eglionton and Mewmarch for the defence.

Zamādār :—No, Sir, he had four days more to come. At Sachinagore on Saturday they have a *Champagne* party and ladies' dance. Mr. Wood can never dance with any other but our Saheb, and I saw that, when I was a bearer. Mrs. Wood is very kind, through the influence of the latter, she got me the zamadary of the Jail.

The Judge in his charge directed the jury about the passage that it tended to make the insinuation against the whole body of Indigo-planters that they did by such means exercise an undue influence over the Magistrates of the districts.* Mr. Long repudiated the suggestion that it was too far-fetched to draw such an inference and that as a missionary his conduct was dictated by his religion and conscience which, he said, convicted him of no moral offence or of any offence deserving the language used in his Lordship's charge to the jury. The Judge yet

* A correspondent of the *Hindu Patriot* wrote :—"Are these Magistrates fit men to govern we millions, when they can not resist the temptation of dining with the planters, and talking with their wives and dancing with them."

Selections from the Records of Bengal Government No. III. Page 792. The Hakims surrounded by the planters sit along witn them while deciding cases and the court is crowded with Amlahs and the Mokhters of the planters.

sentenced him to one month's simple imprisonment and to pay a fine of Rs. 1000/-

Immediately after the sentence was passed, Mr. Long was heard to say "What I have done now, I will do again." The fine was immediately paid by Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha of *Mahābhārata* and *Vidyotsāhinī* fame, though many others were quite eager to do the same.

The above persecution, as the *Hindu Patriot** observed, could only be compared with the judicial murder of Nandakumar, more so in the arbitrariness of the Bench and Mr. Justice Wells, a true incarnation of arrogant, haughty and Bengali-hating Englishman has been deservedly called Impey of the Nineteenth Century.

The incarceration of this revered and benevolent Christian gentleman, a courageous and a loyal servant of the Church, evoked so much public sympathy that the Hindu community under the leadership of Rajah Radhakanta Dev held a meeting at his Natmandir on the 26th August, 1861, passed a resolution for the recall of that Judge and sent it to His Excellency the Viceroy, protesting against the indiscriminate attacks made by the judge on the character of the nation as a whole, to which a reply was communicated to Babu Jatindra Mohan Tagore (afterwards Maharajah), then the Honorary Secretary

* Aug. 6, 1861, *Hindu Patriot.*

to the British Indian Association having stated that though judicial officers should be careful that their denunciations of crime might not be interpreted into hasty imputations against a whole people or community, but in the present case such imputations were not intended.

This prosecution was the first political case of its kind in India and the first national drama was the subject of the indictment.

Popular feeling of indignation was exceptionally strong and its expressions were frequent in rhymes and songs. One of such songs ran as follows :

Harish is prematurely cut off ; Long has been clapped into prison, and the Indigo monkies are bringing ruin upon the golden land of Bengal.

"*Asamaye Hariś malo*
Longer hailo kārāgār,
Nīlbāndare sonār Bāṅglā,
Kallo bhāi chārkhār."

Mr. Long's publication was not the only one translation but we hear of other translations of the drama, called by Mr. F. H. Skrine, as a sort of Uncle Tom's Cabin, and the *Hindu Patriot,** mentions one as follows :

"The London Special of the *Hurkara* states that Messrs. Simkim Marshall and Co., have published

* *Hindu Patriot*, 26th May, 1862.

the *Nīladarpaṇa* in London. Pity, the justice of Sir Mordaunt Wells cannot reach these enterprising publishers."

The drama was, also, as Bankim Chandra writes, translated into other languages of Europe.

The *Calcutta Review*, however, gave an unjust estimate of the drama. It gives it "a very low place as a work of art." *The importance*, says the writer in it, "was political and not literary, and as literature rather than politics is our present theme, we shall not discuss it at great length."* We do not agree with this remark but consider along with Bankim Chandra that it was excellent as a piece of dramatic art too.

Nīladarpaṇa was followed by *Sadhavār Ekādaśī*, *Navīn Tapasvinī*, *Kamalc Kāminī*, *Bīc Pāglā Buro* and *Jāmāi Bārik*† and in realism and action Dinabandhu surpassed even Madhusudan. The rapid passing of the age from Ramnarain to Madhusudan and from Madhu to Dinabandhu is really an interesting development and our readers should carefully notice this.

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* *Calcutta Review*, Vol. 52, 1871.

† We shall deal with these later on.

Chapter V.

THREE ARISTOCRATIC THEATRES

I. The Pathuriaghata Theatre.

The Pathuriaghata Theatre was started in 1865 by Maharaja Sir (then Babu) Jatindra Mohan Tagore at his palace in Pathuriaghata. It was not a spacious house, but a beautifully got up one. The scenes were singularly well painted under the supervision of Girish Chandra Chatterjee, the famous oil painter of Postha at Pathuriaghata, specially the drop-scene, which was 'ablaze with aloes and water-lilies and was entirely oriental.'*

Jatindramohan secured the magnificent orchestra of the Belgachhia Theatre and amongst others, the assistance of the well known actors of the time, the co-operation of even Keshav and Priyanath not being excepted. With this magnificent orchestra and the distinguished corps of the Belgachhia Theatre, Jatindramohan was equally successful in entertaining his numerous friends, European and Indian, for over 25 years and achiev-

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* *Calcutta Review*, 1837. Kisori Chand Mitter's reminiscences.

ing a reputation as high as what had been attained by its prototype, the Belgachhia. Indeed, it left a lasting mark in the annals of our drama.*

Jatindramohan had published a new edition of *Vidyāsundar* in 1858, with vulgar portions purged off and additions made suiting the occasion. A second edition of this was made in 1865 and with this dramatic version of his own, he opened the Theatre on the 6th January, 1866.

Before this, there was a performance of the Bengali translation of Kālidāsa's *Mālavīkāgnī-mitra* in 1859 in Ishan Babu's house under the direction of Babu (Sir) Saurindramohan Tagore, but it was the first as well as the last drama represented there.† *The Stage* as Ardhendusekhar Mustafi says, "was the *Nāutch-Hall,* attached to the west portion of Saurindramohan's residence, the house belonging to the estate of Rajendranath Tagore, father-in-law of Ishan Babu."

Saurindramohan once appeared in the rôle of Kañcukī and Mohendra Mukherjee acted the part of Vidūṣaka.§

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* *Gaurdas Bysak's Reminiscences.*

† Jatindra Mohan Tagore's letter to Madhusudan in 1863, Kisori Chand Mitra's article in *Calcutta Review*, 1873, Modern drama, Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi's reminiscences.

§ *Purātan Prasaṅga*, second series, pp. 154-56.

It is said that on the night of performance, Saurindra Mohan, after being dressed, came running on the stage and drew attention of the Maharaja, who appeared as king, addressing the latter."—Your Majesty, come to the harem at once. Chota Rāṇī (the younger queen) has fainted at the sight of a blue monkey (*nīl bāndar*). The above at once excited a roar of laughter amongst the audience and removed Saurindra-mohan's nervousness, who was comparatively green on the stage. The translation was made by Pandit Ramnarain with the help of Saurindramohan.

But to return to *Vidyāsundar*. When the stage was about to be constructed in the Maharaja's house, the stage in Ishan Babu's house was dismantled and several things of that were used in the present stage, the rest being done at the expense of the Maharaja*.

Vidyāsundar, staged on 6th January 1866, was repeated nine or ten times in continuous succession and the cast was distributed as follows:

Rājā Vīr Sing	...	Radha Prasad Basak (Simla.)
Mantrī	...	(Hari Mohan Karmakar) Jorasanko.
Gaṅgā Bhāṭ	...	Girish Chandra Chatterjee of Pathuriaghata — well known painter.
Sundar	...	Mahendra Nath Mukherjee (Darjipara.)

* *Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi's Reminiscences.*

Dhūmaketu, Koṭāl	...	Hari Charan Banerjee.
Vidyā	...	Madan Mohan Barman. (Hindusthani, afterwards in the National Theatre.)
Hīrāmālinī	...	Krishna Dhan Banerjee (Hugalkuria).
Maids to the princess	...	Sulocanā, Sasthidas Mukherjee (Khardah), Chapala, Jadunath Ghose, Bimala (friend of Chapala), Narain Ch. Basak (Simla).
Pratihārī	...	Umanath Chatterjee.
Praharī	...	Brajadurlabh Dutt (Aheereetola).

The stage-rehearsal had been held on the 30th December, 1865, before the Raja of Rewa, who had come to Calcutta for an interview with Lord Lawrence, the Viceroy of India and was a guest to Jatindra Mohan in his Emerald Bower. None but the distinguished guest with his retinue and the members of the host's family were present on the occasion of the first performance. It is said that the Raja was so highly pleased with the play that when it was over, he caused two packages of Kashmere shawls and a bag of money to be brought and offered for distribution to the actors. But it was courteously explained by Jatindra Mohan that as amateurs they could not accept the presents, but were all the same thankful to the

Raja* for the kind offer, indeed. Such was the enthusiasm of the people for Pathuriaghata palace plays, that three or four days before the performance, all the tickets issued as complimentary cards to the guests were exhausted.

Ardhendu Shekhar Mustafi, the great artist of the National Theatre of the subsequent time speaks of the rehearsals, thus :

"I used to go to the rehearsals, which were held almost every night. Babu Ghanashyam Bose of Garanhatta was the manager † and Keshav Chandra Ganguly of Gosainpara the master···Brajadurlabh's and Girish Babu's performance was considered to be very pleasing and faultless. Radhaprasad Babu was no inferior to them but all the same Brajadurlabh Babu was in my opinion the best of the lot. His superior talents were noticeable even in the insignificant part of a watcher. At the time of inflicting punishment on Mālinī, the speech and movements and the manner of dealing her with Cuffs appeared to be very interesting."

As to how *Vidyāsundar* was appreciated by the

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* *Michael's Biography*, Page 651. The *Prabhākar*, Jan. 3. 1866 corroborates the presence of the Raja of Rewa.

† *Prabhākar* of 13th Feb. 1866, calls him Honorary Secretary.

educated public will appear from the following review of the *Bengalee*, 13th January, 1866 :

"The impersonation of the characters was almost faultless. The part of Hīrā was well sustained. She was a pretty woman herself, past maturity, but upon whom age had not yet quite told so as to make her appear less charming. She was an agreeable talker, sly and coquettish but not innately corrupt or vicious. Indeed, no sooner she saw Sundar, she was herself smitten by his person and his address. But the warmer sentiment melted away as soon as she learnt that the person upon whom Sundar had set his heart was her own sweet mistress : She was too willing to forward his views but by fair and honorable means. The young lovers, however, were for the romance of secret love and they accordingly kept Hīrā carefully out of the way. She was thus innocent of all their intrigues and when she was brought to grief as one privy to the whole affair, she cursed herself for having ever given shelter to such an adventurer.

The part of Vidyā was capitally done. It was essentially feminine. Her love was of her a thing not apart. It was her whole existence. She was nothing if not lovely. Even in her grief, her eyes swollen with tears, when the sad news that Sundar had been caught and sentenced to die was broken to her, she sank under its weight without being boisterous, in a manner that made her look more interesting and lovely than even when she was happy. The songs

which poured fourth under an effort to relieve herself were truly pathetic, though we must say that they somewhat interfered with the effect produced by her capital acting.

The character of Sundar was rather inelegant and rough. Gangā Bhāṭ and the Rajah's Mantrī acquitted themselves so well that we had nothing left to wish for. The Rajah was equally a successful character. But the two chamber maids of Vidyā were altogether deficient. There were nothing feminine about them. Their dress was ill chosen, which heightened the slovenliness of their appearance.

The *Vidyāsundar Nāṭak* was followed by a very laughable farce, which added much to the entertainment of the evening. The whole burthen of the satire fell upon the devoted head of a stupid old Munsiff, who already declined in the vale of years, had the variety to offer himself to a neighbour's wife as a lady's man.

The scenes, both in the *Nāṭak* and in the farce,* were well painted and some were admirably suited to the occasion. We noticed particularly the humble but elegant cottage of Hīrā, which perhaps was taken from some existing model. The Orchestra was excellent and shewed considerable improvement upon those we had heard before.

When we left we only wished that the female characters could be represented by women ; for

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* *Yeman Karma Teman Phal.*

all the time we were painfully alive to the demoralizing tendency of boys and young men throwing themselves into the attitude, the gestures, motions and even the voluptuousness of women. But as under existing circumstances of native society, it is not possible to have any but courtezans to join the Corps Dramatique, we must choose the lesser of the two evils."*

The performances and rehearsals of *Vidyāsundar* created a taste for stage in the minds of the illustrious actor Ardhendu Sekhar, who became afterwards one of the most prominent figures on the Bengali Stage.

The next farce *Bujhle Kinā*, "Do you understand", first performed in December 1866, was also a great success and elicited frequent applause and loud roars of laughter from the audiance.†

Mālatīmādhav, translated by Pandit Ramnarain Tarkaratna from Bhavabhūti's drama of the name, was performed in 1869.§ In 1870, two farces *Ubhaya Saṅkaṭa*, or *the horns of a dilemma* and *Cakṣurdāna*, (opening of eyes) both from the pen of Jatindra Mohan gave sufficient mirth to the specta-

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* *The Bengalee*—13th January, 1866.

† "*The Bengalee*" Dec. 22, 1866.

§ Mahendranath Vidyanidhi says, "It was in 1867, 31st September." As it was staged several times, we cannot ascertain with accuracy when was it first staged. Here it is not very material too.

tors. In the former, the evils of poligamy were described and the other roused the sense of a profligate young man.

The Patrika noticed the usefulness of these instructive pieces observing that one performance produces such good in society as one hundred speeches cannot do.*

Indeed, the 'farces' depicted the manners and customs of the age. Although they attacked with merciless severity the imperfections and ludicrous infirmities of the modern age, they did not render the same, our objects of dislike, nor those excited disgust.†

Of the artists, Mahendranath Mukherjee's Makaranda in *Mālatīmādhav* was excellent as his Vidūṣaka in *Mālavīkāgnimitra*. His performance was so very amusing that on one occasion, Lord Northbrook, who now and then came to witness the performance called him to his presence. Mahendra Babu bowed down to him and addressed the Viceroy as "Sir", instead of "Your Excellency", or "My Lord", and for this he was afterwards reprimanded by the Maharaja brothers, but Mahendra Babu replied in his usual amusing manner, "otherwise, why should I be only a clerk in Gillander's House ?"‡

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* *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 10th March, 1870.

† Kisori Chand Mitra. on Hindu drama, *Calcutla Review*, 1873, Vol. 57.

‡ Mahendra Babu's reminiscences in *Purātan Prasanga*.

To the disappointment of all, no piece was acted in 1871, but early in 1872, on the 13th January, the stage re-opened with *Rukmiṇīharaṇ* followed by the farce, *Ubhayasaṅkaṭa.*

Rasāviṣkārvṛndak was a later production in 1881. Coming from the pen of Raja Saurindra Mohan Tagore, it represented the nine Rasas (emotions) of Kāvya (poetry), Hāsya (laughter), Vilāpa (lamentation) etc., as described in *Nāṭyaśāstra.* The incidents were taken from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata* e. g. Karuṇrasa was represented by Lakṣmaṇa's leaving Sītā in the forests and Sītā's lamentation, Hāsy by Kālanemi's Laṅkābhāga, Bhay Rasa (terrific) by the presence of Nṛsiṃha etc.

It was composed for exhibiting at the Emerald Bower on the occasion of the College Reunion, held on 4th February, 1881, but the hall, where the stage was built, was too insufficient for the large audiance that assembled there and the performance had to be stopped. Then the performance was enacted at the stage of the Pathuriaghata Palace on the 12th February, 1881.

Some time after, when their Excellencies visited the palace on invitation, some scenes were shown to them for their entertainment—* and the scene "Vaṅgavālākartṛk Briṭeniya Ārati" was also shown

* The statement of Mahendranath Vidyanidhi, as corrected by Rai Bahadur Baikuntanath Bose.

when the subjects of Her Majesty—the Chinese, Mags, Mussalman, Hindu, Christian—were all gathered together.

Music at The Pathuriaghata Theatre.

Music is a principal feature of dramatic performance and Pathuriaghata did not lack superiority in point of this.

We have seen that the Orchestra of Belgachhia, introduced at the suggestion of Jatindra Mohan, was the first concert in a Bengali Theatre and was a thing of great attraction. After the closing of that Theatre, not only was this secured for Pathuriaghata, but supplemented further by the recent innovations of his brother Saurindra Mohan, and assisted by the co-operation of the famous musician, Kshetramohan Gosain, author of *Saṅgītasār* and *Svaralipi* and Krishnadhan Banerjee, author of *Setārsikṣā*, it was a thing of great mirth and masterly art. Gosain was no doubt a musician of superior order, but Raja Saurindra Mohan must be credited with being the most conspicuous figure who revived Hindu Music on a scientific basis and there was no second to him, both in vocal and instrumental music. He was recognized for his musical talents throughout the world and the Universities of Oxford and Philadelphia conferred titles of Doctor of Music on him. He started a school *Bengal Academy of Music*, in 1881 and the books of Kshetramohan

and Kali Prasanna Banerjee also contained notations introduced by him. Hindu Music, thus revived by the Rajah, thoroughly demonstrated its superiority over European music and was made an accompaniment of the performance of *Mālatīmādhava*, where the present notation of Hindu Music was for the first time introduced.*

Closely connected, as it is, with our subject, the description of Hindu instrumental music given by Babu Kisori Chand Mitra in the last pages of Hindu Drama† as to the ancientness of I. Stringed instruments (Viṇā, Setār, Tāmburā), II Pulsatile Instruments (Ḍholoka, Khol, Ḍhole, Nāgarā, Bāyā, Tabalā), III Percussion Instruments (Mandirā, Kartāl, Kaṅsi, Nupur) and IV Wind instruments (Mohan Bāṅśi, Śaṅkha) ought to interest our readers.

On the 25th February, 1873, Lord Northbrooke, who was present at one of the performances of *Rukmiṇīharaṇa* and *Ubhayasaṅkaṭa* along with the Hon'ble Miss Baring, the Marquis of Stafford, His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, several members of the Executive and Legislative Councils, Secretaries to Government, and other Indian notabilities, was greatly pleased with the Orchestra and on the closing of the drama examined the different instruments and

* *Vide* :—also *The Hindu Patriot*, Jan. 15, 1872.

† *Modern Hindu Drama*, *Cal. Review*, 1873.

expressed himself highly delighted with what he saw and heard. In fact, he carried away a very good opinion of Indian music.

Raja Saurindra Mohan Tagore had prepared an English translation of the airs played by the Orchestra, which was put in the hands of the European guests to help them in understanding the music.

That Lord and Lady Ripon also showed much interest in the Pathuriaghata Orchestra, we get from the reminiscences of Babu Gaurdas Bysak and the note attached to it by Michael's biographer Jogindranath* :

"Special interest for the Belgachhia concert was evinced by Her Excellency the Lady Ripon. She used to scrutinize every instrument and the manner in which each was played upon. She, more than once, visited the Pathuriaghata. It was at her special request that the Maharaja deputed Belgachhia Orchestra Company, to entertain their Royal Highnesses, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, who greatly appreciated the music. The Duke remarked that some of the airs were particularly delightful."

Thus with the national sentiments, enterprise, public spirit and enlightened liberality† of Maharaja

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* *Pariśiṣṭa*, page 651, third edition.

† *A. B. Patrika*, March 10, 1870,—"no money was spared for scenes and dress."

Sir Jatindra Mohan Tagore and the artistic superiority of his worthy brother Saurindra Mohan, the Pathuriaghata Theatre rose to the rank of a National Institution in Bengal.* It achieved a success, which considering the paucity of dramatic talent, was simply wondered at.

II. THE JORASANKO THEATRE

The contributions of the Jorasanko Thakurbari are also no less remarkable to the development of the Bengali stage. No doubt, the theatre started by the nephews and sons of Maharshi Devendra Nath was short-lived but their *endeavours to resuscitate our Hindu Drama* should be remembered with gratitude. The Tagore family is one of geniuses of Bengal and it has continually kept up histrionic art in full vigour for more than a century. We have seen the Prince Dwarkanath having patronised the Chowringhee and Sansouci theatres and at one time the Chowringhee theatre would have closed its doors permanently but for his large-hearted contribution. In the building fund of the Sansouci also he headed the list of donors. †

Dwarkanath's son Babu Girindra Nath wrote a drama *Vāvuvīlāsī* which was acted in the Tagore House.

We have heard of another of his sons

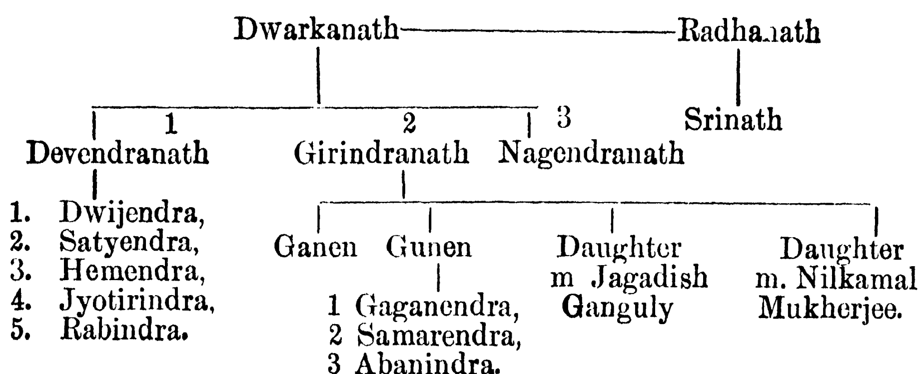
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* *Hindu Patriot*, Jan. 15, 1872.

† Pages 256, 269, 277, My *Indian Stage*, Vol. I.

Nagendra Nath's attempt of starting Theatre.* Then again of the next generation, which we shall here describe. Next to that, too, we find that Jyotirindra Nath was not only a brilliant musician but also a dramatist of no mean order. *Pūrovikram, Aśrumatī* and *Sarojinī* staged afterwards at the Great National Theatre and the Bengal Theatre were soul-stirring national dramas of the time. Then again, Babu Abanindra Nath is an artist of rare merit, and last though not the least, the world-renowned Poet Rabindra Nath has been occasionally seen on the stage till the other day besides producing his well-known dramas — *Rājā O Rāṇī, Visarjan, Acal-āyatan, Tapatī, Cīrakumārsabhā, Citrāṅgadā* etc.

The following geneological table may be of some interest to our readers :—



* Says the *National Paper*, 11th. Dec. 1872 :—"The first project was by the late Hon'ble Prasanna Kumar Tagore. The next by Nabin Chandra Bose....The third attempt of the kind was made by the late Babu Nagendra Nath Tagore. He was very successful in his attempt..."

The Jorasanko Theatre was organised by the members of the Tagore family and the performers were also themselves and their friends. Pandit Mahendra Nath Vidyanidhi to the best help of the future historian collected the reminiscences of persons associated with this theatre or those who were present there. We shall narrate here the facts common to the reminiscences of Babu Nil Kamal Mukherjee, Akshay Kumar Mazumdar, Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi and Jyotirindra Nath Tagore. Nil Kamal was closely associated with this theatre and used to keep a diary and put into it incidents of this theatre and Akshay Kumar was the principal actor, being well known as *Comic* and was in charge of rehearsals.

The youngsters Jyotirindranath, Gunendranath and others at the beginning used to rehearse poems and select passages of dramas like *Kṛṣṇakumārī*, *Eke-i-ki-vale Sabhyatā* and *Vidhavāvivāha Nāṭak*, in the last of which Krishna Behari Sen acted in the rôle of Padmā. These were confined only to the members of the family,* and considered by the elder members of the house as "Child's Play." On an occasion when a toy-stage was being built in one of the rooms, Ganendranath finding that it was done at the instance of his brother Gunendra, accosted him thus :

* *Reminiscences* of Jyotirindranath Tagore.

"What's the good in spending money over a shadowy thing? If you want a stage, do it in a proper way and after full deliberation."

Then a committee was formed with Ganendranath, Nilkamal Mukherjee, Jajnes Prakas Ganguly, Srinath Tagore and Devendranath's eldest son Dwijendranath. As however no suitable drama was available, the projectors advertised in the *Indian Daily News* of 22nd January, 1865, for well written dramas depicting the evils of poligamy and announced a prize of Rs. 200.

Ramnarain responded to the call and obtained the prize by writing his *Navanāṭak,* which was approved by Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Babu Raj Krishna Banerjee.*

The drama was then put on boards and was staged on 5th January, 1867 and repeated eight times and the last having on the 23rd Feb. 1867. The stage was built in the big hall in the first floor and scenes were regularly painted.

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* Other dramas were also advertised on 15th Feb. 1865, *Indian Daily News*.

I. *The Hindu Females*—their condition and helplessness. Prize Rs. 200/-. Time 1st Feb.

II. *The Village Zeminders*—Period 1st Feb. 1866. Prize Rs. 100/-. Time 1st Feb.

The dramas are to be written in Bengali and have to be dedicated to the Jorasanko Theatre.

The characters were represented by elderly people* and cast as follows :

MALES

Gaveś Vāvu (village Zeminder)	Akshay Kumar Mazumdar.
Sudhīr ...	Sarada Prasad Mukherjee.
Vidharmavāgīśa ...	Ananda Chandra Bhattacharjee.
Cittatoṣ (flatterer) ...	Jadunath Mukherjee, (Maharshi's son-in-law).
Neighbour (of the village) ...	Sailendra Nath Tagore.
Neighbour (of the town) ...	Nil Kamal Mukherjee. (Girindra Nath's son-in-law.)
Dambhācārya (Dalapati) ...	Bhuvan Mohan Chatterjee.
Kautuk (Bachelor neighbour)	Matilal Chakravarty.
Subodh (Gaveś Babu's eldest son) ...	Benode Lal Ganguly. (Amritalal's elder brother, Jyotirindranath's brother-in-law).
Mādho (servant) ...	Sailendranath Tagore.

FEMALES

Sāvitrī (1st wife of Gaveś) ...	Sarada Prasad Ganguly. (Maharshi's son-in-law).
Candralekhā (2nd wife of Gaveś ...	Amrita Lal Ganguly, (Jyotirindranath's brother-in-law).

* Jyotirindranath's *Reminiscences*.

Amalā (Neighbour)	...	Thaka Bhusan Ganguly.
Kamalā ,,	...	Dinanath Ganguly.
Vimalā ,,	...	Radhabinode Chatterjee.
Capalā ,,	...	Hem Chandra Banerjee.
Naṭa	...	Nil Kamal Mukherjee.
Naṭī	...	Jyotirindranath Tagore.

The characters were mostly the members of the family.

Kisorichand Mitra writes of the Jorasanko Theatre:

"Akshay Babu acted in the rôle of the husband Gaveś and the misery of the domestic life was vividly realized. In truth, the acting* was infinitely better than the writing of the play. Not only Gaveś Babu but almost all the other actors acquitted themselves most creditably. It is a thousand pities that the untimely demise of Babu Ganendra Nath Tagore proved a death-blow to the Jorasanko Theatre."

Gaurdas Babu also says:

"The representations which they gave from time to time in their house and in which they themselves

* So says Jyotirindranath—Yakhan Gaveś Vāvur choṭa ginnī o vaḍa ginnī Gaveś vāvur ek ekṭā pā dakhal kariyā tail mardan karivār janya ṭānāṭani karita, ār valita eṭā āmār pā, tui āmār pāṭāy kena tail mākhchis, ityādi, takhan Gaveś vāvur avasthā o mukhabhaṅgī dekhiyā darśakerā keval hāsiyā gaḍāgaḍi ditei vākī rākhita.

Indeed, Akshay Kumar was a jestor of no less distinction than Babu Keshav Chandra Ganguly.

took the part of actors could not be surpassed in respect of the excellence of acting, the exquisiteness of music and the sweetness of the songs."

"There was a magnificent concernt party with amateur and paid musicians, Bishnu Charan Chatterjee the celebrated singer of the Brahma Samaj, leading the tune and Jyotirindra Nath playing on the Harmonium. The concert was excellent. It had no borrowed airs and was quite in keeping with national taste."*

Everybody was glad at this time to notice the return of old days of friendship and union amongst Europeans and Indians. There was at that time a good number of social gatherings, where both the classes united very freely and cordially, the latest one of that period was held at the house of Babu Ganendra Nath Tagore on the occasion of the performance of the *Navanāṭak.* Many respectable European and Indian gentlemen were present. Babu Jnanendra Mohan Tagore Barrister-at-Law

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* *The National Paper.* Jan 9, 1867. About acting also, the Paper says :

"Beginning with the graceful bow of the Naṭī, the representation of every succeeding character elicited loud shouts of applause from all sides, and rendered the whole scene an object of peculiar amusement to the audience".

entertained the whole party with lively conversation.†

Navanāṭak was followed by *Manomayī* and *Allek Vāvu,* but that the Jorasanko Nāṭya Samāj was short lived and came to a close in 1867, is also mentioned in the preface of a drama *Hindu Mahilā Nāṭak,* whose author Babu Bepin Mohon Sen Gupta of Shamra got a prize of Rs. 200 in 1868 in response to the advertisement for the best drama for *Hindu Females.*

We close this chapter with a few words as to how the Tagores showed great honour to a dramatist for writing a Bengali drama. Jyotirindra Nath said:

"A very important function celebrated the prize-giving ceremony. It was a memorable day. All the elite of the town was present and the amount of Rs. 500 was put in heaps in a silver plate. The drama was read, met with universal applause and the money was paid to Ramnarain by the president of the meeting, the late Babu Peari Chand Mitter, author of *Ālāler Gharer Dulāl*".

Such patronage and appreciation was worthy of the Jorasanko Tagore House, which is still very famous for art, poetry and culture.

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† *The National Paper*, Feb., 6, 1867.

VALMIKIPRATIBHA

Though of a later date, we cannot but mention an important drama from the pen of Rabindra Nath. It was the well known piece *Vālmīkipratibhā* by Rabindra Nath and we cannot do greater justice to it than quote from the reminiscences of late Babu Amritalal Bose :

"The short, sweet piece was performed at the Jorasanko House in 1880, before a congregation of literary celebrities. Rabi Babu was in his teens, when he wrote this play. Babus Akshay Kumar Sarkar and Indra Nath Banerjee returned from Jorasanko at the National Theatre at Beadon Street, when my farce *Tilatarpaṇ* was being first staged and gave us a brilliant account of the play, predicting a great future for the boy-poet and composer."

III THE SOBHA BAZAR PRIVATE THEATRICAL SOCIETY

In 1864, an association for dramatic performances was formed with Babu Chandra Kali Ghose as president, Umesh Chandra Mitra as Secretary and members of the Raj family as members, and under the auspices of this, *Is this Civilisation* (*Eke-i-ki-vale Sabhyatā*) was staged on the 4th and 29th July, 1865, in the house of Raja Devi Krishna Deb at 1/5, 2/6 Raja Nava Kissen Street, North Calcutta.

The performance, as the *Hindu Patriot* remarked, was exceedingly creditable to the young amateurs; scenes were appropriate and well done; music, though not keeping with high merits of acting, was not inferior, dancing varied and spirited and indeed one of the principal attractions of the performance, but the paper objected to the representation of this farce on the stage of a family theatre.*

The characters, all of which sustained their parts admirably and equally well, were cast as follows :

Kālī Vāvu	...	Kumar Upendra Krishna Dev.
Nava Vāvu	...	Mani Mohan Sarkar.
Cooly and Kamala	...	Kumar Uday Krishna.
Kartā, Durmukh and Mantrī	...	Peari Baishnav.
Gardener	...	Preo Madhav Bose Mullick.
Harakāminī	...	Kumar Brajendra Krishna.
Prasannamayī	...	Kumar Amarendra Krishna.
Nrityakali and Vāvu	...	Gopal Chandra Rakshit.

Kṛṣṇakumārī Nāṭak was next taken up and staged in the *same year*. Babu Mahendra Nath

* Although the farce is undoubtedly one of the happiest productions of the fertile brain of the gifted poet and is a lifelike picture of Young Bengal, full of sallies of wit and humour and written in graceful and familiar Bengali, but the poet has necessarily depicted habits and practices, which are equally shocking to good taste and morals.

The Hindu Patriot, 31st July, 1865.

Vidyanidhi is definite on the point, although we have no newspaper report in corroboration. Very likely, it was confined to a select few and not a public one. The theatre was then abruptly closed.

It is also worthy of note that Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore was arranging rehearsals of *Kṛṣṇa-kumārī* in his palace, but his revered mother not consenting to a tragedy being acted in the house, the idea was given up there.

Eighteen months after, *Kṛṣṇakumārī* was again acted under the direction of a new committee with Babu Kali Prasanna Singh as the President, Rajendra Nath Banerjee vice-President and Babu Barada Kanta Mitra, a son-in-law of the Raj family as Secretary and Pyari Mohan Das (Peari Vaishnav), Mani Mohan Sarkar, author, and members of the Raj family as members of the Executive Committee.

The first public performance after the Theatre was revived, was held on February 8, 1867. The *Hindu Patriot* (11th February 1867) gives a description of this in very flattering terms :

THE SOBHABAZAR THEATRE.

> *Kṛṣṇakumārī* is the best and indeed the only original drama in the Bengali language. Familiar with the richest treasures of the literature of Europe and India, our author has enriched his mother tongue with a production, which would have comparison with the first

class dramas of the ancient and modern classics.

The scenes of *Kṛṣṇakumārī* are laid in that region of Indian Chivalry, which has been the theme of many a song and tale, we mean the Rajputana States...........The reader must have seen that it requires no mean histrionic talent to reproduce the thrilling events on the stage with immense effect. We must, therefore, make every allowance for the shortcomings of the amateurs of the Sobhabazar Theatre, who without the advantage of an experienced director certainly did as much as could be fairly expected from them.

The first three acts lacked life and animation but as the plot thickened and the interest of the audience increased, the actors rose to the level of cries. The death scene was very affecting. It drew tears from many eyes. All the characters in the 1st Act were more or less equal to the occasion and the general effect was one of decided success. There are some very promising amateurs in this corps such as the young men, who personated the characters of Dhanadās, Madanikā, Bhīm Singh, Balendra and Satya Dās and if they persevere, we have no doubt, they will in time prove very successful actors. The scenes were well painted and some of them were indeed exquisitely done. We particularly liked the garden scene. The rolling of the thunder was also well imitated.

As for the concert, great pains seemed to have

been taken for it. The amateurs did not follow the beaten track of the Belgachhia and Pathuriaghata Theatres. Their tunes, too, we must confess, improved as the plot thickened. We wish that they would lay less stress on the Dholak which, to our ear, gave too much of Akrai character to the music.

Pandit Mahendra Nath Vidyanidhi not only collected facts from contemporaneous persons, but also quoted the above report of the *Hindu Patriot* verbatim. As such, with all sources to distinguish facts from fiction, his account possesses great value as to their authenticity.

The cast was as follows :

MALES

Bhīm Singh, Rāṇā of Udaypur	Babu Bihari Lal Chatterjee*.
Balendra Singh (Rājā's brother)	Preomadhav Bose Mullick of Hogalkuria.
Satya Dās ...	Kumar Ananda Krishna.
Jagat Singh ...	Upendra Krishna.
Nārāyaṇ Missir (Jaypur Mahārāj) ...	Beni Madhab Ghosh.
Dhana Dās ...	Mani Mohan Sarkar.
Sūtradhar ...	Kshetra Mohan Bose.

FEMALES

Kṛṣṇakumārī ...	Kumar Brajendra Krishna.

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* Babu Kali Prasanna Singh was to have played the part but very much engrossed in private affairs, he could not do that.

Ahalyā Bāī (Raja's daughter)	Son of Raja Narendra Krishna, Kumar Amarendra Krishna.
Tapasvinī ...	Uday Krishna Dutta.
Vilāsavatī (mistress to Mahārājā) ...	Haralal Sen of Aheritola.
Madanikā ...	Jivan Krishna Dev.
Do. First attendant (Sahachari)	Hiralal Sen.
2nd " ...	Nakul Chandra Mukherjee.

Manimohan Sarkar was to have played the part of Madanikā, but he took the part of Dhanadās as Babu Peari Mohan Das, to whom the selection fell before, could not act before, and his part of Madanikā was played by Babu Jivan Krishna Dev. Thus was Jivan Babu termed *Disbanded Madanikā Kali Avatār.** He, on a later occasion, played the part of Kali in *Padmābatī.*

After this we do not hear any more of this Theatre, but the example set by the above representations in Pathureaghata, Jorasanko and Shobhabazar paved the way for the establishment of many public theatres in Bengal.

* *Rangabhūmī*, 1307, 20th Māgh.

Chapter VI

THE BENGALI THEATRE OF BOWBAZAR.

The Bowbazar Theatre started by some Bengali amateurs of the locality brings us specially into contact with a poet and dramatist Babu Manomohan Bose, whose genius as a play-wright and author of national songs needs no further mention. Babu Chuni Lal Bose, who had often, before this, appeared in the Belgachhia as Naṭī and in different female rôles in the Pathuriaghata Theatre organised the Theatre and Babu Baladev Dhara, who also appeared in the Pathuriaghata Theatre was his chief assistant. Manomohan Babu, who had hitherto distinguished himself as a composer of *Kavi* and *Half Akḍai* songs was approached by Chuni Babu for a dramatic piece and the former agreeing, the party set to work about the construction of a stage in Bowbazar, which was built in the courtyard of Babu Govinda Chandra Sarkar, 3, Govinda Sarkar's Lane, then known as Biswanath Matilal Lane. It was here that the first drama of Manomohan,—*Rāmābhiṣek Nāṭak* (installation of Rāma as a Crown Prince) was staged on a Saturday in the beginning of 1868 and the cast was as follows :

MALES

)aśaratha	...	Ambika Banerjee.
,āma	...	Uma Charan Ghose (of Raipur).
,akṣmaṇa	...	Baladev Dhara (an organiser).
'aśiṣṭa	...	Hriday Banerjee.
umantra	...	Pratap Chandra Banerjee (an organiser).
'idūṣaka	...	Matilal Basu.
'andis	...	Bihari Das and Kanai De.
,ājadūta	...	Kali Haldar.
[aṭa	...	Nanda Lal Dhar.

FEMALES

'auśalyā	...	Chuni Lal Bose.
umitrā	...	Chandra Mukherjee.
itā	...	Ashutosh Chakraverty (of Shibpur).
rmilā	...	Bihari Dhar.
[antharā	...	Kshetra Mohan De.
aṭī	...	Nanda Ghose.

A correspondent of the *National Paper*, who 'itnessed the performance says :

"The stage was beautiful, scenes were in accord-nce with requirements. Visitors were well received nd actors were elegantly and suitably dressed and ıe whole performance was excellent."

March 25, 1868, *National Paper*.

The performance was successful and the drama enceforth became a popular piece for all amateur arties. It was thus ironically termed as *Varṇa-aricaya Nāṭak*.

Prominent among the respectable gentlemen, who frequently came to witness the performance*, were Maharaja Sir Nripendra Narayan Bhup Bahadur of Coochbehar, Raja Digambar Mitra, Mr. W. C. Banerjee afterwards the famous Barrister of the Calcutta High Court, Sir Chandra Madhav Ghose the late officiating Chief Justice of Bengal, Poet Hemchandra Benerjee and some of the Judges of the High Court, both European and Indian.

Manomohan's next successful drama *Satī Nāṭak* was very admirably staged in the winter of 1872 and the dress and drapery to be worthy of the king Dakṣa had to be selected from the wardrobe of a rich inhabitant of Hatkhola, namely Dayal Chand Dutt, who was intimate with the Babus of Bowbazar. The cast was as follows :

MALES

Dakṣa & Śiva	...	Chuni Lal Bose†
Śāntirām	...	Mati Lal Basu
Nārada	...	Pratap Chandra Banerjee
Sabhāpāla	...	Nityananda Dhar
Nagarpāla	...	Baladev Dhara
Nandī	...	Kanai Behari Dhar
Vaiṣṇava	...	Beni Madhav De.
Śaiva	...	Kshetra Mohan De
Naṭa	...	Nanda Lal Dhar

Madhyastha, Magh, 1280 on *Satī Nāṭak* gives a review, but we refrain from giving it as being edited by the dramatist himself.

†*Vide*, page 68 of this volume.

FEMALES

Prasūtī	...	Abinash Chandra Ghose
Satī	...	Ashutosh Chakravarty
Aśuinī	...	Chandra Mukherjee
Alakā	...	Bihari Dhara
Maghā	...	Kali Chatterjee
Sanakā	...	Nanda Ghose
Māyā	...	Nanda Ghose
Bijayā	...	Kali Chatterjee
Naṭī	...	Nanda Ghose

We find, however, an account of the play in *Amritabazar Patrika*, 22nd January, Tuesday, 1874:

"Some respectable persons of Bowbazar have got a stage for amateur performances built at their cost. *Satī* Nāṭak was staged last Saturday. Parts were ably rendered by the artists. We have been much pleased with the performance. The sentences of Prasūtī and Satī should better be curtailed. The Orchestra was very pleasing".

The *Englishman* of March 17, 1874, also says:

"The Bowbazar Amateur Theatre was well fitted on Saturday night, when *Satī Nāṭak* was performed. The Maharaja of Vizingram, Rajah Chandra Nath Roy, the Pakur-Raj and several respectable European and native gentlemen were present. The acting on the whole was a success."

The party next staged Manomohan's *Hariś-*

candra written in December, 1874*, which, however, for the misfortunes to the organiser of the play Babu Chunilal Basu in the death of his wife and eldest son, the whole party became frightened and the Theatre had to be closed for good.

For the graphic description of the Bowbazar Theatre and the staging of the plays of Manomohan Bose, we are thankful to Mr. Sailendra Nath Mitra, M. A., Senior Professor of Pali, University College, Cal. and an erudite scholar, for the laborious collection of all facts relating to its performances. He is a resident of Sankaritola, Bowbazar, and as an ardent lover of drama and stage, collected facts from Babu Baladev Dhara and other persons of the locality. As few contemporaneous papers referred to the Bowbazar Theatre, the pains, which Mr. Mitra took, were arduous and enormous. Since his source was the living memory of persons associated with the Theatre, and not records in journals, the informations may, however, labour under very minor discrepancies, which on examination have, however, been found not to affect the interesting, important and vivid history he has given.

For example, *Rāmābhiṣeka* Nāṭak was staged first in February or March 1868† and not after Durgapuja i.e., September-October of the same

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* *Madhyastha*, Magh, 1281.

†*The National Paper*, March 25, 1868.

year. Again, according to his account *Satī Nāṭak* was performed in winter of 1871 i. e., early part of 1872 (January), whereas of the papers, The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* (30th Jan. 1873) speaks of a new play being then put rehearsals.* These under however, may not form a discrepancy as the play might have commenced in the previous year and staged in 1872, and might have been put in rehearsals a second time in the next year. Newspaper comments (excepting advertisements of opening nights) are often misleading and a real scholar has to sift staff from the kernel. Besides, Mr. Mitra's authorities are definite that *Satī Nāṭak* continued for 4 years and this seems to be the real fact.†

About the performance of another play at Bowbazar, probably by another party, we get the following account :

Jānakī-haraṇa Nāṭak § by Kanai Lal Seal of Bowbazar. The performances were satisfactory, first in Kanai Babu's house, next in the house of Ramlal Matilal.

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* It says that the party was very successful in *Rām-ābhiṣeka Nāṭak* and this time, too, a new play has been put under rehearsal.

† *Vide* the *Indian Athenaum* (English), September, 1923, page, 74, and the Bengali *Vaṅgavāṇī* (monthly Journal, Māgh, 1330, page 764). Both the articles were written by Mr. Sailen Mitra.

§ *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 15th May, 1873.

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Chapter VII

OPERA YATRAS AND DEGENERATED THEATRES.

In our previous Vol. I, we have dealt with Yātrā rather elaborately in pages 109-144. We have described *Kṛṣṇa-Yātrā*, *Sakher Yātrā*, *Purāṇ Yātrā* and *the New Yātrās*. In our present volume, we shall describe how a new class of reformed Yātrās arose in Bengal and a correct description is found in *Vaṅgadarśana* (1289, Fālgun, corresponding to 1883 Febry.) in the following way :

> Kayek vatsar haila, ār ek paddhatir yātrā ārambha haiyāche. Ihāke keha keha aperā vale, keha vā upahās kariyā "oppeyerā" vale. Ihāte sāmlā āche, peṇṭlun āche, koṭ āche, taravāri āche, sādhubhāṣā āche, vaktṛtā āche, cītkār āche, patan āche, utthān āche. Ihāte dekhivār jiniṣ yatheṣṭa. Pūrve loke yātrā śunita, ekhan loke yātrā dekhe. Tāhātei ei nūtan yātrāte veśbhūṣār eta jâk. Saṅgīt o kāvyaraser eta abhāv.

Such yātrās are in vogue even today and we shall now describe a few performances of this kind.

The first opera in Bengali is perhaps *Śakuntalā* by Babu Annada Prasad Banerjee. It was written in a simple and elegant style and songs were appropriate and exquisite. About its performance the *Hindu Patriot,* May 22, 1865, writes as follows :

"We had the pleasure of witnessing the performance more than once and we must say that it did credit to those, who were engaged in it, we hope the opera will supersede the degenerate yātrā."

Ramnarain's *Ratnāvalī,* Kali Prasanna Sing's *Sāvitrī-Satyavān,* Madhusudan's *Padmāvatī* and other dramas, we mentioned before, were sometimes acted as operas, as only a few days ago *Pāṇḍav-gaurav, Janā, Saṭī nāṭak* were so performed.

In 1865, *Padmāvatī* was very well acted as an opera in the house of Babu Rajendra Chandra Dutt (Raja Babu), the well known Homeopath of Bow-bazar before a distinguished audience and the *Hindu Patriot,* Nov. 20, 1865, writes about it :

"The opera was preceded by a play on the piano-forte by the trained but gentle hands of Mrs. Berigny. At about one in the morning commenced the opera. The concert, which inaugurated the performance, was excellent ; in fact, it reminded us of the Belgachhia Orchestra. Then began the play. The actors acquitted themselves on the whole

successfully and creditably. This we can say boldly and sincerely that, of the three dramas, which have been popularised in the form of opera, the performance of *Padmāvatī* was decidedly the best and most successful."

We hear of another opera *Jānakī-bilāp* but we have not seen any copy.

These Yātrās, an admixture of theatre and old Yātrās, were also degenerated into farcical shows and the *necessity of having decent theatres on popular basis was keenly felt.*

On the other hand, the example, set by 1. Belgachhia, 2. Pathuriaghata, 3. Jorasanko, 4. Shobha Bazar Private Theatrical Company, 5. Bowbazar Theatre, was also the origin of mushroom growth, as during the rainy season, of various theatrical associations in Calcutta and Mofussil, too numerous to mention, and we propose to describe only a few, having some historical interest.

6. *Panchanan Mitra's Theatre at Burtola,* Chitpore Road (Goranhata).

Through Panchanan Babu's exertions, Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Padmāvatī* was staged in Sept. 1867, in the house of Jay Chand Mitra with great eclat. This is what Babu Kisori Chand Mitra says in his reminiscences* :

**Calcutta Review* : Modern Theatre, 1873, p. 262.

"It was produced on the Boards of the "Bengal Amateur Theatrical Society" at Burtola, No. 246, Chitpore Road on the 14th Sept., 1867. This performance was preceded by a Yātrā *Padmāvatī*, based on the play in the house of the Duttas of Wellington Square."

The *Dramatis personæ* were:

Rājā Indranīla	...	Behari Lal Chatterjee (afterwards of the Bengal Theatre).
Mantrī, Sārathi, Kañcukī, Aṅgirā	...	Comic actor Girish Chandra Ghose (Nyadaru Girish), late of the Bengal Theatre.
Vidūṣaka	...	Mani Mohan Sarkar, author of *Uṣā Aniruddha*). Friends used to call him as Lord.
Kalī	...	Jivan Krishna Dev (of the Shobhabazar Raj family). (Not J. K. Sen, as said by Viswakosh. cf. "Disbanded Madanika Kali Avatar." in page 128.
Padmāvatī	...	Sib Chandra Chatterjee
Basumatī	...	Haridas Das, late of Bengal Theatre.

It was in *Padmāvatī* that we find that Michael Madhusudan Dutt first used blank verse in the mouth of *Kali.*

7. *Nala-Damayantī at Bagbazar.*

In 1868, *Nala-Damayantī* composed by Babu Kalidas Sanyal, was staged at Madanmohantala

in Chitpore Road, through the efforts of Babu Gopal Chandra Chakravarty and Nyadaru Girish. Kalidas Babu, too, took a keen interest and his composition and rendering of the part met with much appreciation, so much so that he was successful in obtaining a post at the Burdwan Raj House under Rajah Mahatab Chand Roy.*

The cast was as follows :

Nala	...	Gopal Chakravarty.
Vidūṣaka	...	Kalidas Sanyal.
Bhīmasena	...	Gagan Chakravarty.
Kañcuki	...	Shyama Charan Charkrvarty.
Ṛṣi	...	Nyadaru Girish
Damayantī	...	Ashu Chakravarty and Shib Chatterji, next by a Jugi boy.

Induprabhā, published in 1868, a drama by Girish Chandra Banerji of Chota Maheshtala, was staged here. *Vicitravāhu* was played by Gopal Chakravarty.

8. *Śakuntalā at Arpuli, Pataldanga.*

In 1866, *Mahāśvetā*, *Śakuntalā* and *Buro Śāliker Ghāre Row* were staged here.

They next staged Nimai Charan Seal's *Candrāvalī* and *Enrā-i-āvār Barra Log.*

9. *Śakuntalā* at the house of Kali Krishna Pramanik at Kansaripara in 1867, and also at Kshetra Ghose's house at Sankaritola, Calcutta.

* Mahendranath's *Reminiscences.*

10. *Sītār Vanavās* by Umes Chandra Mitra. of Bhowanipore,—performance at the house of Nilmani Mitra.

A correspondent in *Bengali* writes* :

"I welcome with extreme joy the first performance of a tragedy, entitled the *Exile of Sītā* at Bhowanipore. On the whole, the performance was worthy of our best commendation."

11. Mani Mohan Sarkar's *Uṣā & Aniruddha* by Chorebagan party, in 1867.

12. *Jānakī-vilāpa* in 1868 as referred to by the *National Paper*, April 29, 1868.

The mofussil performances were also too many to mention but *Śakuntalā* performance in Janai at Purna Chandra Mukherji's house in 1858, and *Is this Civilisation* of Madhusudan in Atul Mukherji's house and Bholanath's *Bhāle re mor Vāp* in another Mukherji's house at Janai deserve special mention.†

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* *Bengali*, July 7, 1866.

† The following dramas are also worthy of mention :

1. *Hindu-Mahilā Nāṭak*—a drama on Hindu females, their condition, helplessness by Batuk Behari Bandyopadhyaya, Calcutta, G. P. Ry. Company (1869) vol. 50, *Calcutta Review*.
2. *Vikrama Nāṭak* (1864)—by Durga Charan Chattopadhyaya, an East Bengal Dramatist. *Nārāyaṇa*, Māgh, 1322, Nalini Bhattashali.

In course of time most of the amateur performances degenerated into party squabbles on account of unseemly quarrels and mutual, undignified jealousies. As an example, we may mention here of a private Theatre started at Kaylahata, Jorasanko, by Babu Hemendra Nath Mukherjee (second son-in-law of Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore and grandson of Babu Shyamlal Tagore of Pathuriaghata), in his father's house.

The pavillion afforded an accomodation for 200 selected persons of very great position and put on its boards a farce "*Kichu kichu vujhi*"—"Yes, I understand," as a rejoinder to the farce "*Vujhle ki-nā*" —"Do you understand", that was played at the Raja's house at Pathuriaghata.* This trash piece was from the pen of Bholanath Mukherjee and the other one (*Vujhle ki-nā*) was the work of Preomadhav Bose, well-known composer of Kavi Songs. This farce *Kichu kichu vujhi*, which was played at Kaylahata† on 2nd Nov., 1867, (cf. *Vujhle ki-nā*, performed in Dec., 1866) exhibited a too low and vulgar taste. It not only caricatured the Pathuria-

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3. *Cārumukh Cittahārā*—by Harachandra Sil.
4. *Urvaśī*—by a Bengali Lady, published in 1866. Price Re 1, from Derozio Company Press. Vide, Jogendra Nath Gupta's article in *Pañcapuṣpa*.

* *Vide*, page 109.

† Ratan Sarkar's Garden Street, Jorasanko.

ghata Theatre but had personal references to Maharaja Dr. Saurindra Mohan Tagore, who now and then suffered from tooth-ache, and Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi in the rôle of Dantavakra, gave a graphic and humorous description of Dr. Tagore and his tooth-ache. Ardhendu Sekhar was the first cousin of the Tagore brothers, their mother being his father's sister, and enjoyed a pension along with his father from the Tagore Castle. His father asked him not to play the part but he refused. For caricaturing the Tagores publicly, Mustafi with whom the whole Tagore family were greatly offended, lost his pension and all the favours he had hitherto enjoyed there. It is said, Hemendra Nath and Bholanath were present at some performance of *Uṣā* and *Aniruddha* at Chorebagan and planned to start a Theatre, where Bholanath Mukherjee would write plays and Hemendra bear the cost of performances. Ardhendu appeared in the rôles of Dantavakra, Candanavilās and Morādāli, while Dharmadas Soor (subsequently the famous stage-manager) appeared in the rôle of Candanvilāsī. The other characters were Naṭas, Khadyoteśvar Gurujī, Kālu Venod, Varadā and Vaiṣṇavī. § The performance was so charming but vulgar that Madhusudan, who was present together with Babus Gaurdas Bysak, Sarat Chandra Ghose (Bengal

§ Mahendranath's *Reminiscences*.

Theatre), Nabin Mukherjee (Jatindra Mohan's brother-in-law), is said to have expressed *mṛttikāre vāvā mṛttike*, that is, no doubt, it gives mirth, but it is worse than clay in point of vulgarity.

To come to our point, how it turned in to squabbles, we shall mention here.

There is a song in *Vujhle ki-nā :*

O re neśāte ḍhulu ḍhulu kare dunayan,
Rāvaṇ mārila Rāme kānde Duryodhan.

To this Mukherjee composed the following song as a parody, to be sung in the same tune.

Ore neśāte ḍhulu ḍhulu kare dunayan,
Rāvaṇ mārila Rāme kāde Duryodhan.
Nā vujhe karechi neśā
Kothāy āmār raila peśā
Elokeśe ela Keśā karivāre raṇ
Damayantī-bhaye kenco
Padīre peyeche penco
Vidye ha'la garbhavatī ṭhākurer likhan,
Śiver ghare keṣṭār meye
Pencor mata raila ceye
Śakuni ḍhākā Gaṅgāy neye karle palāyan.
Kheyechi asahya mad,
diyechi kār leje pad,
Eto nahe kam vipad kāmḍe nā ekhan.
Eki ha'la dāter jvālā,
Lokālaye viṣam jvālā,
Kāṇete karila kālā vikaṭa vadan.

This song, vulgar as it is, has a history behind it and the following passages will show that clearly :

1. Neśā, mada (wine) refers, to excessive habits of drinking of actors on the stage.

2. Elokeśe—Keshav appearing as Jester, came bare-headed in Belgachhia, No. 1.

3. Damayantī—*Nala-Damayantī*, No. 7.

4. Padire peyeche Penco—*Padmavatī*, played at Panchanan Mitra's house, but now suspended—No. 6.

5. Vidye etc.—to *Vidyāsundar*, at Pathuria-ghata. No. 2.

6. Śiver etc.—*Kṛṣṇakumārī Nāṭak*, at Siva Krishna Dev's house. No. 4.

7. Śakuniḍhākā—*Śakuntalā*. played this side of the Ganges, is being staged at Howrah, Janai. Nos. 9, 12.

8. Danter jvālā—refers to tooth-ache of Dr. S. M. Tagore.

To this Preo Babu, author of *Vujhle ki-nā* wrote a song, in equally vulgar taste, as a rejoinder to Mukherjee's, to be sung in the farce and to be acted a few months after, in the house of Yadunath Chatterjee at Rajvallabh's Lane (Bagbazar).

The song ran thus :

Āmi thiyeṭārer "history",
Grīṇ caśmā nāke diye go,
Dekhi grīṇ rumer "mystery",
Rāṅgā rāṅgā cheleguli sakhī sāje sav,
Kare nārīr matan rav,
Tāder ākār dekhle ākkel guḍum,
Icche hay "kiss" kari.

* * * *

Jay khuḍor vāḍite mājhe ha'la ekṭā dhūm,
Śune hayni rete ghum,
Elo rājār vāḍīr vuḍo hanu Indranīler sāj pari,
Dukāṇkāṭā vidūṣak se lāḍeli sarkār,
"Ḍisbanded madanikā kali avatār."

* * * *

Pāner khilir dokānete ha'la ekṭā "act",
Valchi tāri "fact
Ha'la yugīr meye Damayantī,
Eman thiyeṭāre gaḍ kari.

Green Room Mystery—about drinking parties.

Rājār vāḍīr Hanu—Behari Lal Chatterjee, who took the part of Bhīmsing at the Raja's house, appeared as Indranīla in *Padmāvatī*.

Dukāṇkāṭā, etc.—Mani Mohan Sarkar, who was called 'Lord', took the part of Vidūṣaka

Dhanadāsa at Raja's house, in *Kṛṣṇa-kumārī.*

Disbanded—Jivan Krishna Dev took the part of Madanikā—in *Kṛṣṇakumārī Nāṭak* at Sobhabazar, which was to have been taken by Mani Mohan Sarkar—He also appeared as Kali in *Padmāvatī.*

Vide page 138.

Pāner khilir—refers to *Nala-Damayantī* at Bagbazar. Here first Shib Chandra Chatterjee used to play the part of Damayantī ; next the son of a man of Yugi caste from Kombuliatola. Refers to 7.

In another song Bose sang :

Kaylāhāṭār maylā hāṭāy ha'la tomār ṭhāi.

In the third he showed the merit of a Kavi-walla but the song did not show good taste.

It ran thus :

Bhyālā bhyālā bhyālā mor vāp re,
Tui gôḍār dale kapni paris—
Āpani kalir kāpre.

Rājār vāḍīr vujhle ki-nā
O tār vujhis kāckalā, o tor yāy nā guṇ valā,
Kichu kichu vujhi vale lāglo tor hāf re.

Thus we find that theatre, though revived with great promise, passed into a stage of degradation. We commenced this volume with excess of Kavi

squabbles, but though theatres were thought to replace them, we again turn round to the same.

Theatres, on the other hand, which were really respectable, were, heitherto, generally organised by the educated and intelligent members of the wealthy Bengali community and the middle class, had no access there. It was keenly felt that the public should not be deprived of the refined intellectual amusement and instructive entertainment, and a prospectus of a public Theatre was actually issued calling for shares and subscriptions.* Nothing, however, came out of this—and while Tagores and Devs tried all means to entertain their friends and patrons, common people on the other hand, began to be more and more disappointed, with their desire for the amusement unsatisfied.

It was about this time that there rose a mighty genius, who, with his lifelong devotion as a master artist, inimitable teacher and distinguished dramatist, founded, moulded and nurtured the Bengali Stage on national lines and after years of devotion, industry and sacrifice turned it into an excellent institution for nation-building, which people of all classes have always earnestly sought for education, amusement and culture. By the time of his death in 1912

* The projectors were Radhamadhav Roy (also styled 'Manager') of 102-7 Aheeritola Street, Calcutta and Jogendranath Chatterjee.

Vide, *Hindu Patriot*, 11th Feb., 1860.

within 45 years, the Stage became a place, where people resorted to not only for amusement and "art for art's sake" but like many other civilised countries, it acted as an instrument of culture and light and contributed not a little to the popular awakening of Bengal. This was no other person than the late Girish Chandra Ghose, who is justly known both as Shakespeare and Garrick of Bengal and the father of the Bengali Stage.

Our next few pages of *this volume* will be devoted to describing the earliest chapter of his 'making' and how from the beginning of his appearance, the nation as a whole, accepted him as the first great teacher. The next chapters will deal with the National Theatre and Girish Chandra's early connection with it, along with his talented colleagues and disciples, who assisted him in his noble work and mission as a builder of the nation.

Chapter VIII

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

SADHAVĀR EKĀDASHI

On a certain occasion in 1867, when Girish Chandra was only a young man of 22 or 23, he was approached by a person, who was congratulating himself on his obtaining a ticket for witnessing a theatrical performance in the house of a rich man and he narrated the devices, he had recourse to, for procuring the same. Girish had also reports how people, wishing to have entry into any of the houses, were often turned out by Darwans by the neck.

This touched the self respect of Girish and when next he met his friends anxious to see performances, Girish promised that he would entertain the common people by opening a theatre within a year.

Shortly after, in the same year, Girish Chandra Ghose then serving as a clerk in John Atkinson & Company organised for the first time a yātrā performance of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Śarmiṣṭhā*. To make it more attractive Girish proposed to insert certain songs and for that purpose, he requested Babu Preomadhav Bose Mallick, who readily agreed to

comply with his request. Inspite of repeated reminders, however, when Preo Babu failed to compose the same, Girish and his friend Babu Umesh Chandra Roy of East Bengal felt much disappointed and talked amongst themselves "what's the good of so much trouble, let us ourselves manage as we can." This first led Girish to compose some songs and we quote here a translation of a few lines as the first published composition of the great dramatist :

"Ah ! what a beauty !
"Is it an illusion or a damsel in
reality !
"Perhaps the sylvan goddess
"With her radiant face
"And lotus-like eyes with dews
"Roam in joy.
"Who is this maid and
"Why she is helpless."

The successful performance of the yātrā encouraged Girish to remove the much felt want of the middle class men, who failed to secure seats in the aristocratic Theatres. He found a very able colleague in the person of Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee of Ramkanta Bose Street, the maternal grand father of Srijukta Anurupa Devi, the distinguished novelist of Bengal. They were also joined by Babus Radhamadhav Kar, Arun Chandra Haldar and Mahendranath Banerjee of Paikpara and with

their co-operation and assistance organised the *Bagbazar Amateur Theatre,* in 1868, Babu Arun Halder lending the use of a room in his house for the rehearsals of *Sadhavār Ekādaṣī,* to be soon acted. As they could not afford gorgeous dress and scenes, the above named social sketch was selected for performance.

As we have already hinted before, Dinabandhu was the next powerful dramatist after Madhusudan* and both of them departed considerably from the beaten path of the older Sanskrit dramatists as followed by Pandit Ramnarain Tarkaratna. Like *Nīladarpaṇa* the rest of Dinabandhu's dramas are more or less of the realistic school and attempted to draw graphic pictures of the social and economic condition of the country of his time and *Sadhavār Ekādaśī* gave a living picture of *Young Bengal.* It is after the model of *Ekeiki Bale Sabhyātā,* "Is this civilisation" of Madhusudan, which preceded it. The late Babu Bhudev Mukherjee says that Dinabandhu imitated Madhusudan and by incorporating the character of Madhusudan himself in the drama as Nimchand, Dinabandhu surpassed even his prototype in dramatic excellence. † The character of Neemchand is a unique creation representing a

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* *Vide* page, 101.

† As a poet Dinabandhu was the link between the old school of Iswar Gupta and new school of Madhusudan, but as a dramatist, he was greater.

youngman of high education and culture who took to drinking, which ultimately ate into the vitals of the society. He quotes Shakespeare, Byron and Milton and has a knowledge of men and things. Falling, however, intoxicated in the drain, Nimchand mutters:

"Hail holy light ! the offspring of Heaven first born of the enternal, co-eternal beam."

Babu Akshaykumar Sarkar, ‡ editor *Sādhāraṇī*, says—"these were the words often uttered by Michael himself": 'A Dutt is no body's servant'—'that is, moral courage and I am the son of the son of that moral courage family"—thus Madhu used often to exult in.

Nimchand, being thus a living representation of so illustrious a poet, was a thing of great interest. The great Bankim Chandra, too, wrote about it:-"All the characters are living personations and the subject, too, breathes much of reality."

But the late Rev. Lal Behari Dey, author of *Govinda Sāmanta* of *Bengal Peasant Life* in the *Friendly Review*, a weekly journal, edited by him made a very adverse comment of it. Thus he said :

"If this trash ever be put on the stage, we cannot recommend a better place for its performance than Sonagachee and a better audience than its inmates and their patrons."

‡ *Pitāputra* by Akshay Sarkar, page, 531, Bangabhasar Lekhak,

Dinabandhu, too, was not indifferent to this observation. He was highly offended and gave a fitting rejoinder in his next farce *Jāmāi Bārik*, where Mr. De was ridiculed as *Totārām Bhāṭ*, meaning one who commits things to memory as a Totā (parrot), and produces those like a *Bhāṭ* (thoughtless speaker).

The illustrious Bankim Chandra did not, however, approve of Dinabandhu's caricaturing Rev. Lalbehari De as *Totārām Bhaṭ*. In the preface to the works of Dinabandhu, Bankim said, "Totārām Bhaṭ is a blot (kalaṅka) to Dinabandhu's fame".

As we have seen before, Dinabandhu did not follow the dicta of Sankrit dramatists and avoided a prologue and abundance of songs. But as the public had not yet been accustomed to the new ideals and loved to hear songs as in Yātrās, Girish inserted here as well some songs fitting in with the occasion and wrote a prologue with Sūtradhār and Naṭī. The first performance was held during the Durgapuja festival of 1868 (1275 B. S.) in the house of Babu Prankrishna Haldar of Mukherjeepara, Baghbazar, and Girish appeared in the main rôle of Neem Chand. He was also the master and coached the other artists in different characters, which were as follows :

Atal	...	Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee.
Kenaram	...	Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi.

Jivan Chandra	...	Ishan Neogi.
Nakoor	...	Mahendra Nath Banerjee.
Ram manikya	...	Nil Kamal Ganguly (of Dacca).
Kumudini	...	Amritalal Mukherjee (Bel Babu).
Saudamini	...	Mahendra Nath Das.
Kāncan	...	Radhamadhav Kar.
Naṭī	...	Nagendra Nath Paul.*

The second performance was held at Shampukur in the house of Babu Navin Chandra Dev (Girish's father-in-law and grand-father of Babu Chunilal Dev, actor) and the third at Garpar in the house of Babu Jagannath Bose.

The fourth performance was very important from historical point of view, as on this occasion the author came to see the performance and a host of well known gentlemen came along with him. Chief amongst them were Bijoo Bahadur and other Rajkumars of the Shobhabazar Raj family, Dr. Durgadas Kar (father of the eminent Doctor R. G. Kar and Babu Radhamadhav Kar), Babu Sarada Charan Mitra (afterwards judge of the Calcutta High Court),

* There is some difference in the narration of the cast. Both Babus Abinash Chandra Ganguly and Kiran Chandra Dutt hold that Babu Radhamadhav Kar appeared in the rôle of Rammanikya and Nandalal Ghose as Kāncan on the first night. But Babu Radhamadhav Kar says that he appeared in the rôle of Kancan and Nilkanta Ganguly as Rammanikya on the first night. *Vide*, Radhamadhav's *Reminiscences*, *Rangabhūmi*.

Jadunath Banerjee, the well known writer, and Babu Gopal Lal Mitra, Vice-Chairman (afterwards), Calcutta Corporation. It was held in February, 1870,* on the night of the Saraswati Puja in the house of Rai Ram Prasad Mitra Bahadur of Shampukur and the whole audience unanimously praised the part of Neemchand. In their midst sat the author, struck with amazement, when with wistful eyes and tears he saw the figures of his own imagination, so perfect as living beings on the stage and he came to the actors after the performance was over and embraced Girish paying compliments to him all the while, "I am sure, Neemchand has been written *for you alone*, but for you, the drama could not have been *acted at all*". So excellent was the representation of Neemchand that both Babu Indranath Banerjee and Babu Akshay Kumar Sarkar, two great literary luminaries of Bengal, used to express always that "Bengal's Girish was no inferior to Garrick of any country". Dinabandhu Babu's worthy son Babu Lalit Chandra Mitra, M.A. (now no more) wrote on the death of Girish in the *Bengali*, echoing the sentiments of his father : "About forty-five years ago, Girish Chandra appeared in the inimitable role of Neemchand in Dinabandhu's *Sadhavār Ekādaśī* and when he awoke next morning, he found himself an actor".

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* In *Baṅgadarśan*, Mr. Sarada Charan Mitra speaks of having seen the performance in February, 1870, the year he appeared at the M. A. Examination.

Nimcād-bhūmikāy tumi sudhījan,
Nidrāśeṣe yave tumi ha'le jāgarita,
Dekhile jayer dhvani kāpāye pavan,
Gṛhapath raṅgamañca kare mukharita.

Last though not the least, the late Mr. Justice Sarada Charan Mitter of the Calcutta High Court on a later occasion, wrote in *Vaṅgadarśan* of Agrahayan, 1312 B. S., about this representation of Girish Chandra : "Many a drama in English, Bengali and Sanskrit have I read carefully. Yet some are only present in my memory and some have been effaced from it, and as age far advances, how much more will be lost in memory, but one thing I will never forget in life and that is the life-like acting of Neemchand of that night. That very night I was introduced by somebody to Girish. His youngest brother is my class-mate and Girish has since been an esteemed and honourable friend of mine". Indeed, the ex-judge always held Girish Ghosh in the highest admiration since that performance. Sj. Amrita Lal Bose also said to us that when during that time he came to Calcutta from Benares, he heard the success of Neemchand's part from every mouth and especially from Ardhendusekhar.* The conversation ran thus :

* Ardhendu's autobiographical account also shows that, *vide*, 8th Paus, 1307—*Raṅgabhūmi*.

Ardhendu—See the part of Neemchand, dear, it is worth-seeing.

Amritlal—Ah ! who other than myself can play the part of Neemchand.

Ardhendu—Oh ! dear, no, he is really a fine actor. Come once and see, Girish impersonates Neemchand wonderfully well.

(Amrita Bose's *Reminiscences*).

So also during the combined performance by the actors and actresses of Calcutta at the Kohinoor Theatre in 1912 to raise funds for raising a memorial of late Girish, a few months after his death, Amritalal's song alluded to Neemchand's part :

"Made matta pada ṭale
Nimedatta-Raṅgasthale,
Prothame dekhila Vaṅga
Nava Naṭaguru tār.

Natyamandir, 3rd year, 1319 B. S.

Thus was the position of Girish Chandra as the *Naṭaguru*, secured on the first night of his appearance in the immortal piece of *Sadhavār Ekādaśī*, and his career as an actor began thence.

Sadavār Ekādaśī was also very important from the point of the establishment of the National Theatre, as this organisation grew so prominent within such a short time that it was successful within three or four years to start the public Theatre.

Natyacharya Amrita Lal Bose also acknowledges this with gratitude.

So important a part *Sadhavār Ekādaśī* played in the starting of National Theatre that Girish never forgot to express his gratitude to the author of the piece. The eulogium, he paid in the preface of *Śānti Ki Śāsti*, while dedicating this immortal social tragedy forty years after, to the hallowed memory of Dinabandhu, will speak for itself. The letter runs thus :

"Sir,—You were born to be the founder of the Bengali Stage from which I have been earning my bread. For this you deserve my deepest gratitude. I have heard that respectful regards may visit even the highest region. So I believe that in whatever elevated sphere you may be or in whatever high mission may you now be engaged, my respectful greetings will touch your feet. When the *Sadhavār Ekādaśī* was acted, no theatrical performance could be held without the help of some *rich* men, as it was beyond the capacity of ordinary people to bear the expenses of dress and other things incidental to it. But such expenses had not to be incurred in your society sketch—the *Sadhavār Ekādaśī*—and therefore, the young people, though of ordinary circumstances, selected this for performance. If your dramas were not there, *those young men would not have ventured to start the National Theatre.* This is why

I respectfully greet you as the founder of the Bengali Stage.

For a very long time I had a desire to pay my grateful tribute to you, but I refrained from it because, hitherto, I could not write any drama worthy of acceptance. Now I find that my end is nigh, when will then my wish be fulfilled? This is why I have ventured to dedicate this unworthy piece to your sacred memory. I have emboldened myself with the thought that a god may be worshipped even with humble flowers. (Devatār pūjā)."

Yours ever gratefully,
Girish Chandra Ghosh.

Baghbazar, 3rd Paush,
1315.

Here we ought to mark the change of events in the rise and growth of the National Theatre and Bengali Drama. But for Dinabandhu and his *Sadhavār Ekādaśī*, the middle class young men could not have succeeded to make their project fruitful and but for Girish's powers as the organisor and his exquisite life-like representation of Neemchand, the type of young Bengal, the project would not have ultimately resulted in the establishment of the National Theatre. If the dramas of Ramnarain and Madhusudan were originally meant for the rich people, Dinabandhu's dramas were most advantageously made use of by the poor (Dīnas) and in

Sadhavār Ekādaśī, we find as Babu Amritalal Bose rightly remarks, "the first germ of the Public Theatre in Bengal."* *Indeed Neemchand was as much synonymous with Girish as Sadhavār Ekādaśī was with National Theatre and the Public Stage.*

Dinabandhu and Girish Chandra were, therefore, rightly called the real founders of the National Theatre and Public Stage of Bengal.

Sadhavār Ekādaśī also secured the note worthy artists of great public importance. One of them was Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi and the other Babu Dharmadas Sur.

The story of Ardhendu's success, as an actor in the role of Dantavakra, was listened to with joy by Girish Chandra, who asked his friend Nagendranath to have Ardhendu brought before him. Ardhendhu was the son of Babu Syama Charan Mustafi of Baghbazar and Girish had seen him at a Morning School of the locality, as a companion of his youngest brother, Atul Chandra Ghosh, afterwards an Advocate, Calcutta High Court. He was given the part of Kenaram, which was rendered well. On the fourth night he appeared as Jivan Chandra in place of Ishan Neogi and so perfect was his representation that Dinabandhu himself praised Ardhendu immensely.

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* *Mānasī O Marmavāṇī*, Śrāvaṇ, 1323.

His kicking of Atal after rebuking him "Gueṭā, āj theke toke tyājya putra kollem", was considered as an improvement on the author, who wanted to insert this in the next edition as an addition.

Satisfied though with the performance as a whole, Girish, however, marked the defects of the stage and its management at the first performance and from the following night Babu Dharmadas Sur, who had acted as *Candanvilāsī* as colleague of Ardhendu in the Kaylahata Theatre* and who remarked that the stage required improvements though the acting was good, began to act as the stage manager and we shall presently see how wonderfully he contributed to the development of the stage with the new schemes of artistic management as *the architect of the stage* carrying fully the sense of the masterly dramas of Girish Chandra Ghosh. Indeed, the Bengali Stage could not have attained such perfection, but for the devotional endeavours of Dharmadas. It is said that sometimes disguised as a shifter of the Lew's Theatre, he learnt the shifting arrangement of the scenes, but once detected in his disguise, was turned away. Thus he learnt the art, often submitting himself to various indignities. Of him Girish wrote :

"The actors, who won such high repute on the stage, could not have acquired it but for Dharmadas.

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* *Vide*, page 142.

The renowned artists Ardhendu Sekhar, Matilal Sur, Mahendra Lal Bose, Captain Bell, Sib Charan Chatterjee and others, if alive, would have exclaimed in one voice :—"we have acquired reputation in public, but Dharmadas was often behind the wings ; a few only would have exclaimed "who drew this scene ?"

Nāṭyamandir, Bhadra, 1317, B. S.

In the above performance, Kenārām was played by Abinash Chandra Banerjee of Chorebagan, who, for his excellent representation, was hereafter called as "Ghaṭirām Deputy" ; Radhamadhav Kar appears as Rammanikya and his Kanchan was played by Nondalal Ghosh, who was better known as Nanda ostād. The actors brought scenes and wings from Sibpur and on the prosenium (Mukhapaṭ) was written, "He holds the mirror upto nature." * The fifth performance was held at the house of Babu Lokenath Bose of Baghbazar, sixth at Kidderpore, during the Puja of 1870 at the house of Babu Lakshminarayan Dutt of Chorebagan, grandfather of Babus Hirendranath Dutt Vedanta-ratna and Amarendranath Dutt actor and in this performance another farce of Dinabandhu, *Biyepāglā-Buḍā,* was performed with great success. The part of Ardhendu as Rajib Mukherjee,† an old Brahmin, mad for

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* *Raṅgabhūmi*, 8th Paush, 1307.

† This was written in reference to a living person.

marriage, was a treat. The unique position of Ardhendu as a serio-comic actor was determined here. He was here supported in the cast by Babu Radhamadhav Kar as Ratā Nāpte, Babu Gopal Chandra Das as Pāncur mā and Babu Sib Chandra Chatterjee as Kaner Bhaginī, all of whom scored a great success in the representation of their successive parts. After the performance was over, Girish Babu in the rôle of Neem Chand used to recite the following prologue before the audience, which, we reproduce here as the concluding mirth for our readers :

Mātlāmi to phuriye gelo
Dekhun buḍor raṅga,
Bāsarghare ṭopor pare
Kivā biyer dhaṅga.
Āy nā Nose, Ratā kothā japariṣṭa bol,
Kṣamā kariven doṣ rasikamaṇḍal.
Āsche evār choḍār dal Bhuvno, Nose, Ratā,
Sabhyagaṇ namaṣkār phurālo āmār kathā.

The above verse means, intoxication is over, enjoy the fun, forgive us for our defects and accept our greetings.

The name of the book *Sadhavār Ekādaśī* has been explained by Neemchand at the end of the book. Referring to Atal another specimen of young

Bengal, who, for wine and woman, cares none in the world and feels no shame to leave the most beautiful and accomplished wife, for Kanchan, a prostitute. Of this class Neemchand, though a drunkard, otherwise a good soul, thus exclaims :

Mātāler mān tumi
Gaṇikār gati,
Sadhavār Ekādaśī
tumi yār pati.

The verse can thus be rendered into English:

"Thou, the solace of the drunken
The refuge of harlots,
And widowhood to the woman
Whose husband thou art."

After *Sadhavār Ekādaśī*, it took some time to have the next drama performed. There was no place to meet and the members were mostly occupied in Yātrā shows.* Ḍengu fever also broke out in

* Early in 1870, *Bhālore mor vāp*, a piece by Bholanath Mukherjee, was performed at the house of Jayram Bysak (Charakdanga), which was repeated in the Jonai House at Aheritola. Babus Nagendra Nath Banerjee and Radhamadhav Kar got a counter-piece written by Priyamadhav Bose. Although it was not acted, contests, however, continued for some time in *Saṃvād-Prabhākar* between the two writers. *Vide*, Ardhendu Mustafi's *Autobiographical account.*

Calcutta for some time and at last Babu Brajendra Nath Dev,† brother-in-law of Girish Chandra, with a view to have a permanent stage, built at his house, raised a fund out of the contributions from brokers, baparies and clerks of Messrs Atkinson & Co., where he was the Book-keeper and Girish served as a clerk. Much enthusiasm was seen and *Kṛṣṇakumārī Nāṭak* was actually put under rehearsals. In a short time Brajendra Nath fell seriously ill and the actors were again scattered.

A common friend was next found and Babu Govinda Ganguly, a gentleman hailing from Ichhapur, Vikrampur and an officer of Digu Babu of Dacca at Hatkhala, agreed to lend the use of a room and bear the expenses of rehearsals. The party then thought of a permanent stage and began to collect subscriptions from the promoters and friends. A sum of Rs. 80/- was only collected, Dharmadas and Nagendra each having contributed Rs. 20/-. This magnificent sum was again exhausted in the purchase of a few pieces of cloth and colours for the scenes. The party was in despair again.

Girish then came to the rescue and with the permission of his brother-in-law Brajendra Babu and other members of the family had the materials

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† Father of the actors Babus Chuni Lal Dev and Nikhilendu Krishna Dev, the former of whom was an important figure in the Bengali Stage.

ıf the unfinished stage brought to the house of Babu ℞ajendra Chandra Pal (son of Brindavan Pal) of ℌhambazar and placed those in charge of Dharma)as. As only a short while ago, the services of the ainter had to be dispensed with for want of money,)harmadas himself began to paint the scenes.

At this time a destitute English sailor, without ɔod and raiment, came for charity. In the course f a conversation Dharmadas came to learn that he ras an expert in making painters' colours. Dharma-as gave him shelter in his house and in turn had ll the scenes painted by him. He was so much ccupied with the work of the stage that his duties s a teacher in the Kambalitola Preparatory School rere performed now and again by Ardhendu Sekhar nd sometimes by Babu Amritalal Bose, who had əmporarily come from Beneras, where he was a Iomoeopathic Doctor. Thus with the help of ℩irish and the exertion of Dharmadas, *a permanent tage* was soon built at Rajen Pal's house.

Both Ardhendu and Dharmadas were for charg-ıg prices for admission, but with Girish opposing, ıe suggestion that he would have nothing like it nless Rs. 5000/- was set up for the purpose, the lea was given up.

National Theatre* was the name given to this

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* *Vide*, Ardhendu Sekhar's *Reminiscences*, "Raṅga-bhumi", 6th Magh, 1307.

permanent structure. The name was suggested by Babu Navagopal Mitra, Editor *The National Paper*, who took a special interest in naming every organisation as national and was hence himself named as *National Navagapal.* He wanted to call it the *Calcutta National Theatre* but at the suggestion of Babu Matilal Sur, the word Calcutta was dropped and the Theatre was given its present name.

It took however some time and not until the rainy season of 1871, that any performance could be held in the National Theatre. The party had selected *Līlāvatī* for its performance, but its versification was rather too difficult for ordinery actors to recite the passages. It required a good deal of coaching; so, the members got round Girish for their master.

About this time an amateur party at Chinsurah Hoogly (a few miles off from Calcutta) under the supervision of the great Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (whose name is a by-word in Bengali and whose *Bande Mātaram* broke through the slumber of centuries) and his associate Babu Akshay Chandra Sarkar had the drama of *Līlāvatī* staged with scenes and passages cut off and others added according to their choice. Girish's party was then rehearsing the whole play without omitting anything, as if in competition with Chinsurah party, but during the latter stage, Girish Chandra, owing

to the pressure of office work and also on account of some differences with some members, could not attend the rehearsals and the part of the hero Lalit was therefore given to Dharmadas. As the latter did not do justice to the part in rehearsals, the whole party, headed by Ardhendu, Govinda, Nagendra and Dharmadas, came to the house of Girish and entreated him in the most imploring terms:—"What! we would be defeated by the Chinsurah party and you will silently witness it by standing aloof". Girish agreed at last and so superbly he did his part that the author clasped him in joy and exclaimed, "I was not aware that my verses could be so well read. Take this compliment at least". Ardhendu, too, did his part very successfully in the rôle of Haravilas and maid servant talking in Midnapore dialect. The following list will give an idea as to how the principal actors had their parts distributed:

Girish	...	Lalit (Hero)
Ardhendu	...	Haravilas and "Jhee"
Jogendra Nath Mitra	...	Naderchand
Nagendra Nath Banerjee	...	Hemchand
Mati Sur	...	Mejho Khuḍo
Amritalal Mukherjee or Captain Bell or Bell Babu	...	Saradasundari
Mahendralal Bose	...	Bholanath
Suresh Chandra Mitra	...	Lilabati
Sib Chandra Chatterjee	...	Srinath
Kshetra Ganguly	...	Rajlakshmi

Radhamadhav Kar	...	Kshirode-basini
Hingul Khan	...	Raghua Uḍe
Jadu Bhattacherjee	...	Yogajivan

It was here that Babu Mahendra Lal Bose, afterwards the well-known tragedian, met Girish Chandra Ghosh. After the most successful career of 20 years, when Mahendralal passed away in March 1901, (24th Falgun 1307 B.S.) Girish Babu wrote about him in *Raṅgālaya*" thus :

"Mahendra Lal acquired a taste in acting in his younger days and when our amateur party showed performances of *Sadhavār Ekādaśī*, he used to be present almost every night. After this, when *Līlāvatī* was settled for performance, I met him first. He wanted a part in the play. But the cast was almost settled there. He was, however, allowed to appear in the short rôle of the village Zeminder Bholanath Chaudhury, and to conceal his tender youth he was made to put on a pair of false moustache. The whole party was glad to see the change in countenance. When, in the play Mahendra Lal in his rôle in conversation as a drunken man used to tell Srinath, his brother, "what she says is right, but brother, what can I do" (Scene III, Act IV), the expression will never be forgotten by those, who heard him. Dinabandhu, the author, after the performance addressed him as "Bholanath Chaudhury."

In later years, Mahendralal grew to be a very

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successful actor and was called the *Tragedian of Bengal.* In acting scenes of despair, he was without any parallel.

The performance of *Līlāvatī* received warm applause from the audience and pleased the author so much that he expressed thus : "Now shall I write to Bankim, duo (fie), thou art defeated." Dr. Kanai Lal De also so much appreciated the play that he expressed before Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore himself that "your performance compared with that of Girish's party is but a crow nursed up in a golden cage."*

The yard was large and spacious and yet a number of audience had to go disappointed every night for want of accommodation. So great was the earnestness of the general public to see the theatrical performances, that to avoid rush Dharmadas, the manager, used to distribute tickets on reference to University certificates, which had to be shown him.

Thus, we find that Dinabandhu's *Līlāvatī* was staged by the National Theatre in June or July, 1871, and was repeated four nights only, but owing to excessive rains the stage was considerably damaged and the party was dissolved, not to meet till January, 1872.†

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* *Vide,* Ardhendu Sekhar's *Biography* by Girish Chandra.

† In January 1872, we have evidence of the staging of *Śarmiṣṭhā* at Çoochbihar Rajbari Theatre, through

Some of our friends of the modern period have asserted that *Lilāvatī* was staged in May, 1872 and not on the previous year. The present writer wrote two articles in the issues of Aghrahayan and Magh of 1339 B.S. of the now defunct monthly journal *Pancapuṣpa*, edited by Prof. Amulya Charan Vidyabhushan. The discussion was entirely academic and the history of the stage is not affected in the least whether the play was performed in 1871 or 1872. As, however, no erroneous notion should be entertained even of a minute detail, I weighed all facts most carefully and after a deliberate consideration agree with the late Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi,* that *Lilāvatī* was staged for the first time, by the National Theatre in 1871, and not in 1872.

As theatres were too many at the time,† it is not prudent to identify one for the other without some

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the exertions of the Stamp Superintendent, who devoted whole time to the success of the play. It was during the time of the Political Agent Col. Haughton. *Vide*, *Hindu Patriot*, Jan. 29, 1872, "The Drama of Coochbihar."

* *Vide* Ardhendu Sekhar's *Reminiscences*, *Raṅgabhūmi*, Magh, 1307.

† Theatres and Operas are not a few in this city, If not now, at least some time ago, they were as thick as black-berries. Every street and every lane could boast of one such institution. Nor are those theatres of ordinary merit. Some were of excellent character. *The National Paper*, 11th Dec., 1872.

common peculiarities and one wonders as to how a performance by Shambazar Natya Samaj of 1872,* could be indentified as the first performance done on the previous year by Baghbazar Amateur Theatre (the previous name) or the National Theatre (the present name) or one by Girish, Ardhendu, Nagendra, Mahendra and others.

On the other hand, Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi narrates the incidents of the period from 1871, July (date of *Līlāvatī*) to 1872, 7th Dec. (the admitted date of *Nīladarpaṇa*), covered in seventeen months, with so minute details and accuracy that we have no hesitation to hold his history as the most authentic and accurate. All the contemporaries, Babus Amritalal Bose, Radhamadhav Kar and Mahendra Lal Bose pay compliments for authenticity of his history and none contradicts him. Further discussion here would be too dreary and taxing to our readers.

Līlāvatī spread the reputation of the National

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* *Līlāvatī* was staged last Saturday by Shambazar Natya Samaj and there is contemplation of giving more shows. The company would have done if the performances were done some time earlier. The summer has assumed a dreary appearance and it will be very troublesome both for the actors as well as spectators.—*Madhyastha*, May 23, 1872.

N.B. There is nothing to show that this was a performance by Girish Babu's party.

Theatre in various directions and Girish next selected *Nīladarpaṇa Nāṭak* for performance by his party, as he remembered the sensation the drama produced in mufusil ten years ago, while he was still in his teens. Babu Bhuvan Mohan Neogi, so well known a figure in connection with the public stage of Bengal, came to the field at this time. He lent his garden house standing on the Ganges, for rehearsals from January, 1872* and used to help the party with money from time to time. After the rehearsals had fairly advanced and all the scenes of *Nīladarpaṇa* painted by Dharmadas, Girish was pressed by his colleagues to open the stage as a public theatre by charging prices for admission. He, however, considered the idea too premature as his ideal of "National" was great and something different. To charge prices in the name of the National Theatre with such a poor stage and scenes and a group of a few amateurs confined to a particular locality, would, he argued, be unfair to the public and would also be slighting the hallowed name of the "National" which applied to the Bengali Nation, as a whole, and other peoples would have a very poor idea of the Bengalis, if this little amateur stage were supposed to represent their National Ideal. The difference was not with regard to the name '*National*', as used by the amateurs

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* *Reminiscences* of Ardhendu, *Raṅgabhūmi*.

but with regard to *national* in the name of the public, charging prices. Formerly it was not known to many but by making it public it would attract public notice. Everybody, however, seemed to turn a deaf ear to his objections; they decided almost unanimously, remarking, "If he differs, let us do without him and let us find out a man, who can like him keep us all under control". Girish left the party owing to this difference and Babu Beni-madhav Mitra, who happened to be at the ghat in connection with the Gangāyātrā of a dying man at the time, was made their president.* The dress rehearsal was held at the house of Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee.

The house of Madhusudan Sanyal at Jorasanko (popularly known as the Ghariwalla Bari, 337, Upper Chitpur Road) was rented at Rs. 30, a month and the stage was soon built up there. Though practically there was no pavilion and the audience had to sit under the canopy of canvas, yet the play was a great success and the sale proceeds amounted to Rs. 700/- in the first night, the tickets having been priced at Rs. 2/- first class (chairs), Re. 1/- second class (benches of planks) and As. /8/- third class (raised pucca plinth).* The performance commenced at 8 P.M. (doors being opened at 7 P.M.).

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* *Reminiscences* of Ardhendu Babu and Amrita Babu and Abinash Babu-Kiran Babu's account. *Vide*, also, *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 5th December, 1872.

The cast was distributed as follows :*

Nagendra Nath Banerjee	... Nabin Madhav
His brother Kiran	... Bindu Madhav
Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi	... Mr. Wood, Golok Bose, Raiyat, Savitri.
Mati Lal Sur	... Torap, Raicharan, Gopal, Muktear.
Mahendra Bose	... Magistrate, Sadhu Charan, Padi mayrani
Amrita Lal Bose	... Sairindhri
Abinash Chandra Kar	... R. P. Rogue
Kshetra Ganguly	... Saralata
Amrita Lal Mukherjee (Bell Babu)	... Kshetramani
Sib Chandra Chatterjee	... Gopi Dewan
Gopal Chandra Das	... Nabin Madhav's Muktear
Tincowri Mukherjee	... Rebati, Aduri
Shashi Bhushan Das	... Amin, Pundit Mahasaya, Kaviraj
Purna Chandra Ghosh	... Lathiwal
Jadunath Bhattaeherjee	... Rayyat
Golok Chatterjee	... Khalasi
Kartik Chandra Paul	... Dresser

Ardhendu, in the rôle of Mr. Wood, was a unique figure and the performance was very much appreciated, though the author keenly felt the gap of a serious actor in the absence of Girish Chandra. Properly speaking, this was the first public theatre,

* *Reminiscences* of Ardhendu Sekhar & Amritalal & Kiran Babu and Abinash Babu's account,

having opened on the 7th December, 1872 (on 23rd Agrahayan, 1279 B. S.), under the old name of *National Theatre*, with the performance of *Nīladarpaṇa.* In it the important figures were Ardhendu, Nagendra, Dharmadas, Mahendra Bell Babu and Amritalal. The money, however, was spent for the benefit of the stage and improvement of dramatic literature and none used to take a share of it except Ardhendu who needed occasional help.* Practically, all the actors worked for the sake of a high ideal and the Bengali stage was really built on the sacrifice of a few Bengali youths of the middle class.

This was the first time that Babu Amritalal Bose took a part here. He was then practising as a Homeopathic Doctor, first at Benares and then at Patna and after Girish Chandra left the party, the part of Sairindhri, which had been given to Babu Radhamadhav Kar, was played by him. The representation was excellent and his weeping impressed the audience. It is said, Ardhendu taught him to weep at a deserted house in the evening, which since acquired a notoriety as *Bhuter Bari* or the haunted house.

It will not be out of place to put before our readers the contemporary opinions regarding the performance

* On the third night he had to be paid before he was persuaded to come and play his part.

of *Nīladarpaṇa*. The *National Paper* called it an event of national importance* and felt it an honour to record it in its columns. The Patrika considered it a great thing that without any support of any *rich man*, the theatre promised to be a national concern, which would ensure great benefit to the society and encourage talented writers to write plays.† The *Madhyastha* was gratified at the sight of the audience, both by their number and their outward appearance. Indeed, the number was so large that the authorities found it difficult to accommodate all with seats and a number of people was found going back, disappointed. ‡

About the performance, *The Indian Mirror* § rightly remarked that throughout the whole, the acting was most excellent and it did not know what to admire best—whether Sadhu Charan's ease of acting, Sairindhri's maiden modulation of voice or the gentle motion and the accents of the graceful Saralata and *The Mirror* considered that although Torap in some instances outheroded the Herod, the part was, however, acquitted very creditably.

The National Paper, however, gave the palm of superiority to the following actors over the rest,

* *The National Paper*, 11th Dec., 1872.

† *The Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 12th Dec., 1872.

‡ *Madhyastha*, 15th Paush, 1279, 28th Dec., 1872.

§ *Indian Mirror*, 26th Dec., 1872.

amongst the male—first Torap, second Golok Bose, third Nabin Madhav, fourth Dewan, fifth rayyats, sixth the little boys and among the females, Golok Bose's wife, Sairindhri, Kshetramani, Padi mayrani. It continued that the actings of the females were most sympathetic, especially when Golok Bose's wife played the idiot's part, when Kshetramani grew righteously indignant at the shameful conduct of Rogo—the Shahib, and they all lamented over the miserable condition of Bose's family. Many amongst the audience shed copious tears, when they saw the enactment of parts.

Madhyastha considered, however, Golok Bose, Dewan of the Indigo Factory, Mr. Wood, Mr. Rogue, Amin, Muktear, Kaviraj, Torap and Kshetramani to be classed as the best, Nabin Madhav, Sadhu Charan, Pandit, Daroga, four boys, Sairindhri, Saralata, Padi mayrani as second class artists and others, who approached those closely to be third class actors. In fact each one vied with another in excellence to verify the slang *Look to me.* It also considered that the manner in which the Dewan of the Indigo Factory, Mr. Wood, Kaviraj, Torap, Kshetramani in all the scenes, Golok Bose in the Magistrate's Court, Savitri in her insanity, Kshetramani at the time when the Shahib was using force upon her, Revati at the time of Kshetramani's death, Torap and Nabin Madhav when they rescued

Kshetramani from Mr. Rogue's hands, Sairindhri when Nabin Madhav was lying unconscious, and Saralata in that scene and just before she was killed by her mother-in-law, were excellent and highly praiseworthy.

The Patrika also expressed gratification at the excellent representation by artists. In its opinion, "The loyal and spirited character of Torap was well represented. The rôles of Golok Bose and his wife were played by one and the same actor. He is an expert actor. But he could not well represent the wife's part. Sairindhri was not so good, but her cries were indeed marvellous. Saralata was indeed a young wife, weak and gentle. Aduri was excellent. Each and every character delighted us. The performance was faultless".

Some of the artists have also left reminiscences, which are here worth mentioning. Babu Dharmadas Sur believed that such an excellent representation could not be surpassed in future. Babu Ardhendu Sekhar felt that with the high appreciation they received from the audience, their breasts were puffed up ten times in glee. Babu Amritalal Bose in his personal reminiscences about his co-actors says, "Handsome Nagendranath did well as Nabin. The stalwart figure of Ardhendu most appropriately fitted in with the character of Mr. Wood. Abinash Babu had a very handsome

appearance and his features looked rather rough and stern and he could thus splendidly represent the cruel and reckless officer of the Indigo Factory—Mr. Rogue. Last, but not the least, Matilal's acting as Torap and his make-up were so excellent that none has yet been able to act that part so successfully as Matilal."

Indeed, inspite of petty mismanagement, here and there, the acting, on the whole, was so excellent that even the famous educationist Babu Rajnarayan Bose of the Brahma Community after witnessing the performance remarked, "that the ideas he had formed in his mind about the dramatic characters, their pose, posture, speech and dress tallied with the reality."*

The authorities, however, had to meet one difficulty. Our readers must have read at page 99, how Rev. Mr. J. Long was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for libel, in 1861 and the Englishman† expressed surprise at Government's allowing the play to be represented without libellous parts being removed. Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee, however, on the following day (21st Dec.) wrote in excuse that "the object of the promoters was simply to represent village life and it was far from their object

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**Madhyastha*, 28th Dec., 1872.

† *The Englishman*, 20th Dec.

to traduce the character of Europeans and that the libellous portions have been omitted."*

The Deputy Commissioner of Police was present on the 2nd night of the performance (21st) and inspite of his assurance that he came there only as a spectator, one of the promoters, however, appeared on the stage, at the close of the play and apologised—"We act this drama because the state of the village-life has been vividly described, but not from malice, nor for the disgrace of any community."†

Nothing, however, was heard after this.

We ought to give also the other side of the shield here.

"Sulov" still complained of the company not having the good taste to exclude obscene scenes and expressions from the play.‡

In the articles "National Theatricals" and "Father", published in the *Indian Mirror* of the 19th and 27th December, respectively and in other papers, appeared also adverse criticisms of the play. The former issue contained:—"Histrionic arts:

"The play failed to bring the atrocities of the Indigo Planters vividly before the eyes of the spectators. Golok and his wife were represented by

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* *The Englishman*, 23rd Dec., 1872.

† *Madhyastha*, 28th Dec., 1872.

‡ *Mirror*, 19th Dec., 1872.

the same actor, but though an adept, he was not so successful in the wife as in the husband, a comparatively very inferior part. Sairindhri the heroine was not upto the mark ; her weeping tone was unnatural."*

The issue of the latter date also contained the opinion of "Father" in the following expressions :—

"Up goes the drop-scene next and out comes the ricketty stage with its repulsive hangings. I was also touched at the tragic death of the author. Golok Bose's limping exit and nasal voice was simply ridiculous. The much-injured ryot, too, vied with each other in comic preference. Sarindhri belonged to some extinct race of mortals, whose weeping tone some antiquary might recognise and it was a curious sight to see her drawling with the upper lip curved and head beating time."†

Some actors of the day believed that the articles were written by or at the direction of Girish Chandra Ghosh. It might be that the leader of the *Sadhavār Ekādaśī* party really represented the "Father of the stage." Though there is no definite proof beyond mere suggestion to attribute the authorship to Girish, we must at the same time admire the unnamed critic, whoever he is, for the anxiety the articles expressed to see the stage really purged off evils so that real art

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* *Indian Mirror*, 19th December, 1872.

† *Indian Mirror*, 27th Dec., 1872 ; *vide*, *A. B. Patrika*, 26th Feb., 1932 (Author's articles).

might be shown from the very beginning and what he says has been mostly corroborated by journalists here or there. That Girish Babu satirised the party for taking so rash and premature a step by making the theatre public without a better house and a better stage may, however, be seen from the following song, which he put into the mouth of Babu Radhamadhav Kar, while playing a farce in a Yātrā performance.

The song, satirical, as it is, represents a chapter of the history of the National Theatre and we give it below :—

> Lupta Veṇī vohiche Terodhār
> Tāhe Pūrṇa, Ardha-Indu, Kiraṇ,
> Sindūr mākhā matir hār
> Naga hote dhārā dhāiyā Sareshati,
> Kṣīṇakāyā.
> Vividha vigraha ghāṭer upar śobhā pāy
> Śiva Śambhūsūta Mahendrādi
> Yadupati avatār
> Alakṣyete Viṣṇu kare gān, kivā
> dharmakṣetra sthān.
> Avināśī muni ṛṣi kocche vase
> dhyān.
> Savāi mile deke vale Dīnabandhu
> kara pār
> Kivā Bālumoy velā, pāle pāl reter belā !
> Bhuvanmohan care kare Gopāle khelā

Miche kare āśā 'yata cāṣā' niler
godāy dicche sār.
Kalaṅkita Śaśī sarase amṛta
barase
Jwan hoi ba deener gaurav eta dine
khase
Sthānamāhatmya hāṇḍi shunḍi poisha
de dekhe bāhār.

The song is a satire on some actors of the play, whose names we give below in order of the rhyme.

The meaning may be explained thus:

Lupta Veṇī—Venimadhav Mitra, President, but whose name was not announced.

Purṇa—Purnachandra Mitra, actor.
Ardha-Indu—Ardhendu, the leading actor.

Kiraṇ—Kiran Chandra Banerjee (Nagen Babu's brother).

Sindūrmākhā 'Mati'—Matilal Sur.

Naga—Nagendra Bandyopadhyaya, the Secretary, who was the organiser.

Śiva—Siv Charan Chatterjee.

Śambhūsūtā—Kartik Chandra Pal—dresser.

Mahendra—Mahendra Lal Bose.

Jadupati—Jadunath Bhattacharjee.

Viṣṇu—Bishnu Chandra Chatterjee of the Brahma Samaj, who used to sing from behind.

Dharma—Stage manager—Dharmadas Sur.

Kṣetra—Kshetra Mohan Ganguly.

Belā—Bel Babu—Amrita Lal Mukherjee.

Pālepāl—Rajendra Nath Paul, one of the well-wishers, and others of his caste.

Bhuban Mohan Care—Bhuban Mohan's parlour on the Ganges, where rehearsals used to be held.

Core—Wanders, or Banks of the Ganges.

Gopāla—Gopal Das, actor.

Cāṣā—Actors of the Sadgopa caste (there were many).

Niler Gorai—*Nīladarpaṇa*, put on for performance.

Amṛta—Amritalal Bose.

Dīner gaurav—The fame of Dinabandhu might decline with this acting and on such a stage.

Sthānamāhātmye—On payment of 8 as., persons of all castes saw the performance sitting together unlike other occasions, when seats of Bhadraloks used to be separated from those of the ordinary classes.

Here the song refers to actors, though it may also mean the Triveṇī Tīrtha or the junction of the three rivers—the Ganges, the Jamuna and the Saraswati at Triveṇī, few milesnorth of Howrah.

However satirical the song was, "it did not", says Viswakosh, "create any bad feeling"—It must be admitted that the song too did not contain the sting

apt to be found on similar satires and Babu Amrita Lal Bose says, "we relished the song and sang it in chorus." Ardhendu also said, "all our names were so cleverly put in the song that it reflected much credit on the poetic imagination of Girish Ghosh."*

Our readers would mark the difference in tone and expressions in protests even when one does not agree and this was expected of the 'Father of the stage.' He was critical to a finish without any vulgarity anywhere.

But, however successful the acting was, *Nīladarpaṇa* failed to produce any effect in Calcutta, while representations of the drama produced an electric sensation in mufasil in the year 1861, as we narrated at page 95 of this book. There was really much of comic show and the author very rightly missed the presence of the serious actor in Girish. The *Patrika,* too, was disgusted "at the audience bursting into loud laughter when the poor ryots were crying aloud after being kicked to the ground by the Indigo Saheb."† It rightly endorsed that *Nīladarpaṇa* should better be performed at Krishnagore, the scene of the plot and its neighbouring places Jessore and Murshidabad. The *National Paper* also agreed to this view.

Nīladarpaṇa was not, however, the first public

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* *Rangabhūmi,* 1307, 20th Māgh.

† *Amritabazar Patrika,* 12th Dec., 1872.

performance of Bengal. Here, too, Dacca was the pioneer and *Rāmābhiṣek Nāṭak* was staged on the 30th March, 1872. The young men of Dacca, the pick of the society at the time, raised money by selling tickets for the performance and devoted it to charitable and educational purposes. A decent stage was built with scenes painted by well known artists. No school student was, however, allowed to come to see the performance. Tickets were priced at Rs. 4, 2, and Re. 1. The performance was highly appreciated.*

From another account† we have the following :

"A large number of persons witnessed the performance. Amongst others, some notable Mahomedans, the District Superintendent of Police, Mr. Pogose and a few Christian gentlemen were present. All of them expressed much gratification at the representation of the play. The D.S.P. was so much pleased that while leaving he expressed that he would not miss the next opportunity of bringing his wife with him. Mr. Pogose too repeated that the amount (Rs. 5) was really spent for a noble cause. All the actors did well and the special amongst them were Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Mantharā and Daśaratha."

To come back to The National Theatre, it how-

* *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 28th March, 1872.

† *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 4th April, 1872.

ever, continued showing performances on every Saturday as per following :

7th Dec., *Nīladarpaṇa.*

14th Dec., *Jāmāi Bārik* by Dinabandhu.

21st. Dec., *Nīladarpaṇa.**

As to *Jāmāi Bārik*, the small farce, Pandit Ramgati Nyayaratna says, "The domesticated sons-in-law and fathers-in-law, who have to maintain them, will be brought to their senses on reading the book."

As to the performance, the *Hindu Patriot* of the 16th Dec., 1872 writes as follows :

"Last Saturday night the National Theatre gave a second performance. On the last occasion Babu Dinabandhu Mitra's *Jāmāi Bārik* or the sons-in-law's barracks—a farce was performed. The play was well sustained. The sons-in-law performed their parts admirably. The drollery of the scene when they appeared in a group and exchanged notes was very telling. But some of the female characters were not quite successful. On the whole, however, the performance was good. We would recommend the amateurs to have a repetition of *Nīladarpaṇa* and to give a timely notice to the public as many, we are told, are desirous to see it."

The *Patrika*, however, wrote a long article about

* Contemporaneous advertisements in *Englishman*, *Indian Daily News*, *Madhyastha*, 8th Paush, 1279 B.S. and *Purohit*, 1901, Sravan.

the performance, portions of which would only be necessary :*

"As we shed tears in *Nīladarpaṇa*, we laughed in *Jāmāi Bārik.* Each and every actor of this time is a perfect jewel. Every part was well done, especially that of Padmalochan, Bagala and Bindu was wonderful. Every time we saw them, we felt extremely delighted. But we were greatly disappointed for the omission of one scene. Kamini lamenting for her husband is an excellent scene in the original, but the whole thing was reported through the mouth of the Mayrani. That marred the whole effect of the scene. This is due to an error of judgment on the part of the author and Dinabandhu should have realised it. There was another mistake for Padmalochan to sing and dance after the quarrel of the two co-wives. That is not consistent with his character."

The performance of *Nīladarpaṇa* on the second night fetched Rs. 450 only and was not of the superior order like the former one. It was also considered necessary to form a body of persons, who would honour those visitors to whom honour was due, select proper dramas and look to the better management of the stage and auditorium. Such was the earnestness that the leading newspapers, including the *Patrika* and *National Paper* began to offer suggestions for

* *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 19th Dec., 1872.

the improvement of the stage, scenes, music * and dances.

An idea as to how the making of the National Theatre was done by the devotion of the workers in the field may be gathered from the autobiographical account of Babu Amritalal Bose :

> At that time, coolies and servants
> were but few,
> Even they dreaded to work.
> People, therefore, have seen near the Laldighi
> Bhuni Babu fixing placards getting
> upon a ladder.
> Now-a-days everything is done by mere orders ;
> Even the bearers can now compose
> songs for an opera.
>
> *Amṛita Madira.*

On the 4th and 18th January, 1873 the National ...e played *Navīn Tapasvinī*—a drama by ...andhu and the *National Paper* wrote :

...aladhar, with his quips and cranks and wanton ...ejoy, with his love for Kamini with her ...nd grace, charmed the audience."

Ardhendu as Jaladhar surpassed all past ... Girish Chandra said, "this representation ...alleled in the unparalleled"—"atulaniya ... laniya."

* ...rika of 12th Dec., 72 said, "none was pleased ...ith the music."

Jaladhar was the king's minister but a man devoid of common sense and wanted to make love with Malati, the chaste wife of a Sadagar Ratikanta. Through the intelligence of Mallika, Malati's cousin, he was converted into a *Hondal Kut Kute*, a curious human figure with a monkey's cap, his body immersed in tar and then covered with cotton and afterwards locked in a big cage. This part and the couplet :

Mālatī Mālatī Mālatī phul
Majāle majāle majāle kul .

still feels one with great mirth. It will be no exaggeration to say that Raja Chandra Nath of Nator was beside himself with joy on seeing the part of Jaladhar, played by Ardhendu. The part of the hero (Bejoy) was taken by Babu Amrita Lal Bose and that of *Navīn Tapasvinī*, (lit. the young devotee) by Kshetra Ganguly.

All these dramas that formed the first and the most important supply for the National Theatre make Dinabandhu the pet of the age and about the merits of these the great Bankim Chandra writes as the following :

"Dinabandhu's dramas were realistic. The plots originated from incidents, characters of living beings, old novels, English Literature and current tales. *Navīn Tapasvinī* was one of such dramas. The story of Rajah Ramani Kanta was a real one, the

story of *Hondal Kut Kute* was borrowed from old novels and the characters of Jaladhar and Jagadamba were conceived in imitation of Sir John Falstaff's discomfiture in Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor."

Līlāvatī was staged on the 11th January, 1873, but a real Lalit was wanting to give it life. Everybody was so thoroughly charmed with the long passages recited by the inimitable Girish in Rajendra Pal's house about two years ago, that the audience here was displeased with the lifeless acting of the hero. some really shouted, "lovers should stop love discourses."*

Hitherto performances were held on Saturdays only. From the 15th January those continued on Wednesdays also. On Wednesday, the 15th January, *Biyepāglā Buḍa* was presented with some pantomimes, represented for the first time on the public stage. Pantomime, as the *National Paper* says, "was played with better skill and success than what was expected."

The *Madhyastha* also gave a nice description of the following pantomimes :

"The Hunch Back, News above for National Civil Service, Mustafi Sahebka Pucca Tamasa, and the Fairy Land."

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* *Madhyastha*, 10th Falgun, 1289 B.S,

These comic sketches were not regarded with favour by the thoughtful section of the people, who began to cry for better and newer dramas, but none was found to step into Dinabandhu's place. Ramnarayan's *Yeman Karma Teman Phal* was next staged on the 22nd January, 1873, and his *Navanāṭak* on the 25th. These two were old dramas. As each week, a new drama was tried, pantomimes were not even reduced to any writing, and acting used to be carried more with the help of a prompter. This was the origin of the actor behind the scenes.*

Next a new drama *Naisho Rupea* from the pen of the illustrious journalist late Babu Sisir Kumar Ghosh was staged on the 8th February, 1873, and as an elaborate social drama, it deals with the prevailing marriage custom of the time, the reverse of what is in vogue in the present day. There was pernicious custom in vogue in our society when payments as marriage demands were exacted from grooms of Kulin by the bride's fathers who did not allow their daughters to go to father-in-law's house until full payments were made and sons-in-law were treated with harshness and indignities if before clearing all arrears they came to the house of fathers-in-law. This was more prevalent amongst the Kulins.

The demand of money for Ramdhan's daughter

* Girish's Biography of Ardhendu.

Sarala in the drama being Rs. 900/-, the book is so named. Satulal, brother of Ramdhan with a bubble in hand, figured as the social reformer, whose efforts saved Sarala and got her married to Ranjan, a hearty young man of the village, both of the couple having loved each other :

The drama, original as it was, served its purpose and in the opinion of the *Patrika* "no other writer had shown greater insight into human heart as the author of *Naisho Rupea,* like Dinabandhu Mitra, who attempted to excite laughter or as Madhusudan, who tried to rouse poetical emotions in the poetic or poetical people."

The drama, original as it was, served its purpose and although the *Patrika* paid eulogy for showing a great insight into human heart, we would better reproduce the observations of the illustrious Bankim Chandra,* which run thus :

"There is not a single true drama in Bengali. The author has attempted to write the book in a highly simple and clear style. We can not say, he has been a great success ; yet for the very attempt he deserves just praise. The tyranny of Sanskrit has been so great, that it has become quite unbearable now-a-days but the writer, in order to avoid Sanskrit, has fallen to the rusticity of the village dialect."

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* *Bangadarsan*, 10th Falgun, 1279.

"The chief merit of the book consists in showing self-less love. This makes us forgive the author for all his short-comings. There is little interest in the drama, and Satulal is a queer person but not improbable, there is nothing in this character for which the author may be justly proud. Satulal is Neemchand in Hemp-smoking and therefore Neemchand's second. But it can be equally remarked that it means no mean credit to a modern playwright. Satulal has a full development. He can be recognised by his face and even from distance by his very voice. We cannot but laugh at his words when we are by his side; again when we notice tears in him, we feel strongly attracted towards him. Satulal has got so many virtues that it is no wonder that he would stand by Neemchand resting his hand on the latter's shoulder—We conclude our criticism, but if this is the first attempt of "the unknown writer", we are sure, his works will be prized when he will be more experienced in tackling language and emotions."

Regarding the performance, *The National Paper* commented :

"Ramdhan, the Brahmin, father of Sarala the heroine of the play, maintained his part very well. The part of Gopimohan Bhattacherjee, another Brahmin, was well acted. He excited great laughter during his conversation with his wife. Kanai

Ghoshal, a village gentleman, who afterwards proves to be the father of Ranjan, acted his part to the satisfaction of the audience. His conversation with his wife Shashi's mother in the last act was very pathetic. Satulal, the younger brother of Ramdhan was really comical. Satu is a Ganja-smoker with an open heart. He excited great laughter whenever he appeared on the stage. In the third scene of Act III, the professional disputes between the Allopathic Doctor, the Homeopathic Doctor (Niloo Babu) and the native Kaviraj were very amusing.

"In the fifth Act the bridal hall was a beautiful spectacle. Navin Babu's short address in the Sabhā on the transcient state of worldly happiness in the tone of a Brahma preacher elicited cheers. Amongst the female characters Sarala's mother, Shashi's mother and Shashi acquitted themselves well. The love scenes between Ranjan and Sarala were tolerably represented. Ranjan was very hasty and rather flipp. Sarala's expression, motion and gestures were graceful and quite feminine. We are very glad to notice this time the presence of several respectable European gentlemen and ladies in the Theatre; a judge of the High Court graced the Theatre with his presence."*

Ardhendu appeared in the rôle of Satulal, Amrita Babu in that of Ranjan and Kshetra

* *The National Paper*, Feb., 1873.

Ganguly of Sarala. In appreciation of Ardhendu, we have the following from Girish Chandra Ghosh :

"Those who beheld that performance said before the author himself that what was represented by Ardhendu was not possible from any other actor, even of the English stage. His calling for bids *Naisho Rupea Ek, Naisho Rupea Do, Naisho Rupea Teen* and other expressions used in soliloquy were, though an improvement on the author, yet, extraordinarily original and interesting."*

Of Ardhendu Girish Babu said that his comic acting was of a very high order. When he used to play a part, he was something different from the part itself; the extraordinary comic element blended with seriousness was Ardhendu's creation and it was more appealing to the audience who used to see Ardhendu all in himself and not the part he played. In the farces and pantomimes† too, Ardhendu was marvellous to a degree, and unique in character. He was at his best in *Biyepāglā Buḍa* "when lying down alone in his bed, he expatiated in a beautiful and well paused soliloquy on the prospects

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* *Biography* of Ardhendu.

† *Biyepāglā Buḍā, Kubjār kughaṭan, Nava Vidyālaya, Mustafi Sāheb kā Pucca Tāmāsā, Paristhān, Belāti Babu, Model School, Subscription book and Green Room* of a Private Theatre.

of the forthcoming nuptials, which opened on him like a new Elysium."*

About this time Debcarson a humorous actor from the continent arrived in Calcutta with Mr. and Mrs. Hall and entertained the public specially the Europeans at the Grand Opera House by his comic songs and sketches. The performance began from a Thursday of November 1872 with *Ḍākghar* and other shows † and notices used to be scattered broadcast *Dekho, Debcarson Saheb ka Pucca Tamasa.*

On the 7th December, 1872 the very night when the public theatre was opened at Jorasanka, Debcarson caricatured the Bengalees in a farce as *Bengali Babu.* He used to draw large crowds, earned a good deal of money and was much applauded when he sang:

"I am a very good Bengalee Babu
"I keep my shop at Radhabazar ;
"I live in Calcutta, eat my ḍālbhāt
"And smoke my Hookka."†

* *Indian Mirror*, 22nd, January, 1873.

† "The Bengali Babu", "Professor", "The School Master", "Police Court", "The Blind Beggar", "The Bombay Parsee."

† Debcarson stayed only a couple of months in Calcutta and was spoken of with much interest by the *Englishman* as will appear from the following :

" The inimitable Deb gave his last regular performance

On the Bengali stage, however, there was only one man, who was a match for this Saheb and that was Babu Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi. To give a retort to Debcarson's above caricature, Ardhendu, dressed as a Saheb with an old hat, torn coat and dirty trousers and with Violin (Behala) in hand, used to show *Mustafi Sahebka Pucca Tāmāsā* to caricature the so-called Sahebs in the following song, which he used to sing with gestures :

"Hām vaḍa sāhev hai duniyāme
"None can be compared hāmārā sāth ;
"Mister Mustafi" name hāmārā
"Cātgāoṅ me merā Vilāt.
"Coat pini, pentaloon pini
"Pini merā trousers ;
"Every two years new suit pini
"Direct from Chadney bazar.
"Dirty niggār hate hāmāre
"Vaḍa maāyl' āche, chho chho".

By this and other comic sketches of the like nature (generally known to all as *Mustafi Saheb ka*

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at the Opera House, on Wednesday night and the attendance was full. Though not such as might have been expected, Deb's part of the performance was capital and we are glad to hear that he will take a benefit at the Town Hall before leaving Calcutta with his Company. He deserves, and ought to have a bumper house."

The Englishman, Friday, Dec. 20, 1872.

Pucca Tāmāsā), Mr. Mustafi who was henceforth regarded in the stage as Mustafi Saheb or *Saheb* by all, was a match for Debcarson and both drew equally crowded houses by their pucca tāmāsā, though in the opinion of Girish Chandra, Debcarson's humour was of a much lower order than that of his Bengali rival.

There is also another incident, which needs mention here. A few months before the "National Theatre" showed its performance before the public, Mrs. Lewis arrived in Calcutta with her Dramatic and Burlesque Company and entertained the public with a number of plays and farces. The Opening Night of the Lewis Theatre was the 28th September, 1872, at the Town Hall. After some time she built a stage at the Chowringhee Road on the Maidan on the mode of *The English Stage* and was popular here. Mr. Geo Lane Anderson and G. H. Leonard were artists on her stage and she continued till 1876. It might be that this theatre and Debcarson's shows, were the immediate incentives to the starting of the Public Theatre in hot haste.

Bhārat-Mātā, was also staged on the 15th Feb., 1873 at the instance of Babu Sisir Kumar Ghose, editor *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, and of this we shall give a detailed description hereafter.

As all possible dramas were now exhausted, the party at this time wanted to play Michael Madhu-

sudan Dutt's *Kṛṣṇakumārī Nāṭak*, the well known tragedy of the day. But to make it a success worthy of the drama, after the performance of the play at the Shobhabazar Private Theatrical Company they knew that the part of Bheem Sing could not be rendered by anybody in the troupe except by their leader Girish Chandra Ghosh, whose deep clear and resonant voice with his kinglike appearance fitted in well with the part and so all came to Girish Babu at his house in a body. Girish agreed to play the part on one condition that his name would be in the advertisement as Bheem Sing "by an amateur." They, however, added 'distinguished' before the word 'amateur' and appeared with their leader in the main rôle on the 22nd Feb., 1873, (just two months and a half after they had separated,) and Rajah Chandra Nath of Natore, who had been very much pleased with Girish's acting and postures during rehearsals, himself dressed "Girish with his own princely costume and his rich sword, the insignia of his rank, dangled from his jewelled belt." Michael was present during the first performance and highly praised the histrionic talents of Girish Chandra. The acting of Girish was marvellous. It is said, so deep was his voice and so strong his feelings that when he called twice in his anguish the name of "Mānsinha", "Mānsinha", two spectators of the stall fainted on the first night. Equally heart-rending was his expression to his wife at the death

of his daughter—Mahiṣi, do you see your Kṛṣṇā "Mahiṣi, tomār Kṛṣṇāke dekcho".

Mahendra Babu was in the rôle of Rāṇi Ahaylyā and drew tears from the audience by the tragic part. To Kshetra Ganguly, the poet addressed thus : *Kṛṣṇakumārī*, you have done perfection."

Dharmadas says—"we do not get even one hundredth of the encouragement, which all sections of the Calcutta public including the weathiest citizens gave us then."

The cast was distributed as follows :

Balendra	...	Nagendra.
Dhanadās	...	Mustafi Saheb.
Jagat Sing	...	Kiran Banerjee.
Mantrī	...	Gopal Chandra Das.
Satyadās	...	Mati Sur.
Kṛṣṇakumārī	...	Kshetra Ganguly.
Vilāsavatī	...	Bel Babu.
Rāṇī Ahalyā	...	Mahendra Bose.
Madanikā	...	Ashutosh Bose.

Girish's presence was also required at that time, as between the members disputes were going on as to who would be in charge of money, etc. About a month before this, we find in *Madhyastha*, *The National* (22nd Jan., 1873) and other papers that some actors—Babu Mahendra Lal Bose, Mati Lal Sur, Amrita Lal Pal and Rajendra Nath Pal—members—notified in papers that according to a

meeting held on the 19th January, Babu Navagopal Mitra,[1] Manomohan Bose[2] and Hemanta Kumar Ghose,[3] were made arbitrators. *Madhyastha* apprehended that the failure in mediation might require even the intervention of law courts. The difference arose in a wrong move of Devendra Nath that his brother Nagendra, Amrita Bose and Dharmadas should declare themselves as proprietors to which Dharmadas objected.[4]

The matters grew worse and in a meeting presided, over by Babu Hemanta Kumar Ghose, both parties attended but could not come to any definite settlement. We next find an advertisement in *Englishman* and *Indian Daily News* of the 24th Jan., 1873 and subsequent dates, as the following :

National Theatrical Society—

"At a meeting it was resolved that Nagendra Nath Banerjee, the former Secretary of the Society, be discharged and Babu Mati Lal Sur be appointed in his place."

Within 10 or 11 days differences seemed, however, to have been settled and that Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee continued to be the Secretary.

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1 Editor—*National Paper*.

2 Editor—*Madhyastha*.

3 Editor—*Amrita Bazar Patrika*.

4 Dharmadasa's *Autobiography*.

It was at this time* that Girish was called both to play that part as well as to control and direct to the management and the above settlement was the immediate effect of his arrival.

Girish wrote in Ardhendu's biography :

> But at that time, men, who posed to be patrons in order to appropriate the sale proceeds of the theatre, declared the difference of opinion as enmity towards the theatre. But I had to join it when the *Kṛṣṇakumārī* was staged. I was selected for the role of Bhīmsinha. At that time the difference between the two sections became more intense and wide. I refused to appear unless my name was advertised as an amateur. But the avaricious amongst them objected to it, fearing that it might frustrate their object. But when they found me unyielding, it was advertised, "Bheemsinha by a distinguished amateur."

Girish Babu became henceforth the director,† and

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* *Madhyastha*, 13th Magh, 1279 ; *National Paper*, 22nd Jan., 1813 ; *National Paper*, 12th March, 1873 and *Madhyastha*, 3rd Chaitra, 1279 ; *I. D. News*, 5th Feb., 1873 and *A. B. Patrika*, 30th Jan., 1873 and also Dharmadasa's *Reminiscences.*

† *Indian Mirror*, 26th Feb., 1873, says that the editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* and Girish were the only directors and hoped that under both, the latter being one of the best native amateur actors of the town and combining in himself a good education with an excellent taste and a tolerable knowledge

united the artists, went on merrily for some time but owing to excessive rains in the early spring of that year, they had to close the theatre at Sanyal bardi in a few nights only. On the last night, 8th March, 1873 after a few Pantomimes, Michæl's *Buḍaśālīker Ghāḍe Row* and *Yeman karma teman phal*, they took leave of the public with a timely composed song from the pen of Girish Chandra, sung by Babu Behari Bose (Jyeṭhā Behari) in female dress :

The song reads thus :

"With a sorrowful heart I take your leave
May I ask the wise not to forget me ;
In the midst of beauty and joy
My heart withers in despair.
Though the copious rains make all happy
The earth has put on her vernal garb ;
But it grieves me more, to depart *
in this season of joy.
Though hope to appear in a new guise,
on a new built stage."

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of human nature, the National Theatre will daily improve.

* After the song was finished, all those present, began to express regret. They began to say 'why do you stop, why bid adieu. Why should we forget you, we would come wherever you would go.'

Amritalal's *Reminiscences*.

After the theatre was closed apparently for rains, but really for jealousies a dispute arose about the possession of theatre's property—its funds, dress, furnitures and others things. The dispute could not be amicably settled and it gave rise to two parties. Amrita Babu joined Ardhendu's party. The second party was in fact led by Rajendra Pal. Dharmadas Sur was in that party. It is even now talked about, that the disruption of the National Theatre was due to the excessive greed of those, who wanted to be the party leaders.*

Babu Amritalal Bose also agreed that those, who were in charge of fund, could not render any account and the disputes arose about that.

The dress used to remain then at Nagendra Nath's house but then the stage and scenes remained with Dharmadas. An opportunity soon arose for the prominence of the Theatre.

It was at this time (3rd Feb., 1873), His Excellency Lord Northbrook, the Viceroy of India, laid the foundation stone of the Calcutta Native Hospital, which was to be built on the banks of the river at Pathuriaghata. Dr. Macnamara a specialist in Opthalmy was collecting subscriptions at the time. Babu Rajendra Nath Pal and Dharmadas Sur in an interview with Dr. Macnamara suggested a benefit performance and the Doctor gladly agreed to take

* Ardhendu's *Biography* by Girish.

on hire the Town Hall for the performance and bear necessary expenses. The condition was that all proceeds of sale of tickets would be given him for the purpose. They took a week's time and saw Girish, as within so short a time they could never venture to appear on the stage without his help. As the purpose was noble, Girish agreed and took upon him the task of coaching the actors, himself playing the rôle of Mr. Wood. *Nīladarpaṇa* was selected for the performance.

Only three classes of seats (Reserved seats Rs. 4, First class Rs. 2, and Second class Re. 1) were issued and the sale proceeds amounted to Rs. 1100/- only, of which Rs. 400 met the necessary expenses. Almost all the disciples and colleagues of Girish Chandra—Mati Sur, Mahendra Bose, Abinash Kar, Gopal Chandra Das, participated in the performance. The part of Sairindhrī was played by Babu Radhagovinda Kar (afterwards Dr. R. G. Kar), Radhamadhav's brother.

The performance was shown on the 29th March, 1873 (Saturday) and the Town Hall was very finely decorated with flowers, leaves and proper lights, Dr. Macnamara being himself present at the reception. The play was a grand success and Girish Babu so well fitted his part with the make up, movements and articulations of voice that people thought that Mr. Wood's part was being played by

a Bengali knowing English friend of the Doctor. Girish's representation received greater appreciation by the cultured audience though Ardhendu could carry the mass more powerfully. The reason is for the difference in the two distinct conceptions. Ardhendu represented Wood as a hard hearted greedy Englishman, whereas Girish showed ·him as one not cruel by nature, but doing his duty as an English settler (merchant) with vengeance.

The scene where Rogue was assaulting Kshetramani moved the audience so much that Babu Dina Dayal Bose, Babu of one of the most renowned Barristers, Mr. Woodroff (Justice Woodroft's father), asked for police help for the arrest of the saheb. It was a regret that few Europeans were present but that they wanted to see another performance, was echoed in the following observations of the *Englishman* of the 31st March, 1873 :

The National Performance at Town Hall

On Saturday night (29th March), the members of the Calcutta National Theatre performed in the Town Hall the play of *Nīladarpaṇa* for the benefit of the National Hospital. It is a great pity that so short a notice was given, as on that account very few Europeans were present. However, the natives mustered very strongly on the occasion and testified by their repeated plaudits how much they enjoyed the performance. The acting was exceedingly good

throughout. We hope, the management will give another performance shortly."

We have already mentioned that Nagendra Nath and Ardhendu were not in this party. They, however, did not fail to assert their official connection. When at a special meeting held on the 26th March, 1873 by Dharmadas's party at the Baithak Khana house of the late Babu Rasik Neogi's ghat, it was resolved, amongst other things, that Babu Amrita Lal Pal be nominated Honorary Secretary in place of the above gentlemen,* the above two gentlemen also made a counter move. When all preparations were going on for the above performance of *Nīladarpaṇa* at the Town Hall, they not only threw the blame on Girish Chandra, but issued a notice on the 29th March, the night of performance as follows :

"We are sorry to announce that owing to a breach amongst the members of the above society through the instrumentality of one of the directors Babu Girish Chandra Ghose, the play of *Nīladarpaṇa*, to take place this evening at the Town Hall, is hereby postponed till further notice."

Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi—Master.

Nagendra Nath Banerjee,
Hony. Secretary.

29th March, 1873.

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* *Vide*, *Englishman and I. D. News*, Advertisement, March, 24th—29th, 1873.

Of course, Babu Amritalal Pal, the newly appointed Secretary issued a contradiction at once to the following effect :

> "Gentlemen, friends and patrons are requested not to lend their ears to the above advertisement of several persons, who are against the theatre."

National Theatre,
Office, Baghbazar,
29th March, 1873.

Amrita Lal Pal,
Hony. Secretary.

As no counter organisation was able to stop the performance of *Nīladarpaṇa* under Girish, Ardhendu-Nagen's party calling itself "Hindu National" rented the Grand Opera House and showed performances for three nights on :

5th April—1. Model School and its examination. 2. Belati Babu. 3. Distribution of Title of Honour. 4. "Mustafi Sahebka Pucca Tamasa" followed by 5. "Śarmiṣṭhā" with Nagendra Babu as Yayāti, Ardhendu Vakāsur, Sib Chandra Śukrācārya, Bel Babu Devajāni and Kshetra Mohan Śarmiṣṭhā.*

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*		
Private boxes to admit 5	...	20
Lower stage to admit 4	...	16
Dress Circle	... ...	4
Stalls front	... ...	3
" back	... ...	2
Pit ...	... ...	1

12th April—Tragedy of "Vidhavā-vivāha."

19th April—"Kiñcit Jalayog, Ekei-ki-bale Sabhyatā, Dispensary, Charitable Dispensary, Bhārat Saṅgīt.

On the 26th April, 1873, "Hindu National" showed a performance of *Nīladarpaṇa* at the Howrah Railway Theatre, which was rather adversely criticised by one Dinanath Dhar in *A. B. Patrika*, 12th June, 1873 :

"Mr. Wood out-did his part, so was not ably rendered. He ought to read the passages in Hamlet, sc. ii, Act III."

But unable to do much in the face of competition with Girish Chandra, they left for Dacca by the 1st week of May.* Before they left, they commenced building a stage at the house of Babu Kaliprasanna Sinha.†

The National Theatre again gave another benefit performance on the 5th April at the Town Hall for the Charitable Section of the Indian Reform Association staging *Sadhavār Ekādaśī* and *Vilāpa* (lamentation of Bhāratamātā). But the sales fell off this night owing to competition of Hindu National.

On the 12th April, 1873, the National Theatre

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* Amrita Lal Bose's *Reminiscences*. *Pūrātan Prasanga*, 2nd Paryaya, p. 128.

† *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 15th May, 1873.

affixed their stage at the house of Raja Radhakanta Dev,* showing the performance of *Kṛṣṇakumārī Nāṭak*. But a very untoward event occured that day. There was a voucher in the name of Amrita Babu, showing some money owed by the National Theatre to him, as the three directors decided so, and on the 12th, Amrita Lal Babu got an order of attachment before judgment and had the scenes and stage of the National Theatre attached. The money was, however, paid by Kumar Girindra Krishna Dev Bahadur of the Shobhabazar House and the performance went on as usual. The Raj Kumars, who had once attained great success by staging this very drama before, appreciated the performance by Girish Chandra's party very much and encouraged the players. Kumar Amarendra Krishna, who had played the part of Rani Ahalya highly praised Mahendra Babu for the part. About Ahalya, Girish himself wrote :

> The audience could not restrain their tears at the performance of the Rani in the drama, even though in appearance he did not look quite upto the mark. He who acted the part in the performance at the Shobhabazar Raj House

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* *Indian Daily News and Amrita Bazar Patrika*: *National Theatre*, *Calcutta*, Saturday, 12th April, 1873. The performance to take place at the elegant *Natmandir* of Raja Radhakanta Dev with Dharmadas as Stage manager.

forgot his jealousy and greatly praised the rival actor.*

On the 19th April, 1873, they showed the performance of *Nīladarpaṇa* and on the 26th some pantomimes, Piano being conducted by young boys of the age of 7 and 10.

On the 10th May, 1873, they showed a performance of *Kapālakuṇḍalā* of Bankim Chandra. The dramatisation was made by Girish Chandra, at Sanyal-bari, though not staged there and the parts were coached by him. On the night of the performance, here the manuscript of the drama, however, disappeared in a mysterious way. But Girish managed the whole thing in such a wonderful manner (by extempore prompting) that nobody could feel about the loss of the dramatised book and the play with Matilal Sur as Kāpālika and Mahendra Bose as Navakumar was a great success. This was, however, advertised as the Grand Farewell night or † the last night of the seasons and the "National" closed its performance and next pursued the Hindu National at Dacca.

The Hindu National, however, had already met with a hearty reception at Dacca. They lived at the house of Babu Radhika Mohan Roy, brother

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* *Natyamandir*, p. 919, Vol. I.

† Vide, *Amrita Bazar Patrika and Indian Daily News*, 8th May, 1873.

of Mohini Babu, Zeminder and Banker of Dacca and showed their performances on the East Bengal stage of which we mentioned before, and the English Band of Nawab Gani Mia's house and the concert of Mohini Babu's house were in attendance. Amrita Babu says :

> "Babus Kali Prasanna Ghose, Editor, *Bandhav* and Abhaya Charan Das (Rai Bahadur), Dr. Kedarnath Das used to attend the performances and the public appreciated it. Mr. Kemp of the *Bengal Times*, however, made jesting criticism. We also satirised Kemp in a farce :—Mr. Rampini, the then Joint Magistrate, and Mr. Witheral, D. S. P. joined in laughter."*

It goes without saying that the Dacca people appreciated the performances very much.† *Navanāṭak* was also played there.

The Hindu National had also already been successful in enlisting popular sympathy at Dacca and some people had purchased season tickets. The "National" with Mati Sur, Mahendra Bose, Gopal Das and others under the management of Rajendra Pal and Dharmadas Sur came now and advertised :

"The Real National has now arrived," and showed performances at Jivan Babu's compound.

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* *Reminiscences* of Amrita Bose, p. 129. *Puratan Prasanga.*

† *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 22nd May, 1873.

They could not, however, (being late in the field) secure much of the patronage of the local gentry. The worst of it was that Girish Chandra Ghose, whose co-operation they had counted much, could not join the party as Mr. Atkinson did not grant him leave. Both the sections suffered losses but *National* suffered much greater and had to come back by mortgaging the scenes with Hindu National. Both parties returned to Calcutta and *National* used to have rehearsals at Bhuvan Babu's garden house on the Ganges, while Hindu National did at Nagen or Ardhendu's house.

One good result, however, came out of the evil. Prosperity divided them, but adversity united again. Thus, on the 10th of July, 1873, united they gave a benefit performance of *Kṛṣṇakumārī Nāṭak** in aid of the orphans of the poet Madhu Sudan Dutt, after his untimely death, which melancholy event took place on the 29th June, 1873. The united troupe played in full strength at the house of Raja of Dighapatia (Rajbati) during the first-rice ceremony of Kumar Pramadanath. This was the first instance of the party's going outside on contract, —Girish, Dharmadas, Amritalal and Nagendranath not having accompanied it. There were four performances at Dighapatia.

* *Indian Daily News*, *A. B. Patrika*, 10th July, 1873 and *Hindu Patriot*, 14th July, 1873.

On the way, there were more performances at Rajshahi. The troupe staged some plays in Sept., 1873, at Berhampur, Murshidabad, under the name of "National." Babu Bankim Chandra Chatterjee was then a Deputy Magistrate here. He became intimate with the party.*

At this time Nagen Babu and Dharmadas Babu got some money by showing performances at home. They next joined Babu Bhuvan Mohan Neogi.

On the 7th Dec., both National and Hindu National celebrated the first anniversary of Public Theatre under the presidency of Raja Kali Krishna Dev Bahadur, when Babu Manamohan Bose delivered a very interesting lecture.†

The troupe in the old Jorasanko site staged some dramas: *Hemalatā Nāṭak*‡ (a martial drama) by Haralal Ray on the 13th December, 1873, *Kamale Kāminī* on the 20th and *Hemlatā* again on the 27th, when The Great National Theatre—a permanant structure worthy of the name of a stage, was built and of this we shall speak later on.

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* Ardhendu Babu's *reminiscences*, *Rangabhumi*, 11th Falgun, 1307.

† *Englishman*, 10th Dec., 1873 and *Madhyastha*, Paush, 1280.

‡ *Hemalatā Nāṭaka*: the parts of Satyashakha, Hemalata, Bikram Singh and Kamala Devi were very well done; the performance was a great success.
A. B. Patrika, 18th Dec., 1873.

Boiled down it comes to this, that in the face of the aristocratic theatres, Girish conceived the plan of having performances for the middle class men and matured it with all success and Dinabandhu supplying him with dramas, Girish worked wonders. Indeed, *Neemchand* laid the foundation for the future stage of Bengal.

During the time of the next drama, *Līlāvatī*—the stage was named "National" and this again became "public theatre" with *Nīladarpaṇa*. But it is an undeniable fact that it became prominent, when it was open to the public, but Girish had left his connection then.

Chief in the first two dramas, but absent in the third ! No doubt, he did not take part, out of a principle, but his spirit worked there. *Nīladarpaṇa* was chosen by him, parts were coached by him, and his disciples, who appeared in the first two, appeared in the third as well. Dharmadas Sur, too, was the stage manager in all the three dramas.

Further, because they could not do without him, they came to him, when *Kṛṣṇakumārī Nāṭak* was put on the bill within first two months, greeted him as their guide with all persuation and selected him as their arbitrator, when disputes arose. Indeed, Girish Chandra was the master spirit from whom all inspiration came, and the National theatre was like a son to him, whom the father begot, nursed him,

gave him a training but was absent, when the formal *Nāmakaraṇa* Ceremony was performed. In short, Girish Chandra Ghose was really the *Father of the Bengali Stage*. The late lamented Amritalal Bose, himself a great actor and brilliant play-wright, used to call himself, Mahendralal, Matilal, and his name-sake Bel Babu as moonlight deriving its splendour from the sun-like Girish. Thus, he used always to refer about him :

> Drunken, his feet shaking, when
> Nime Dutt appears on stage ;
> Bengal first saw then
> Her first stage father.

In the next Volume of this book, we shall find how the huge contribution in all kinds of dramas came from Girish, how he pleased the audience with his masterly acting, which was no inferior to that of a Garrick and Roscius and how he founded the National Stage (again), the Star Theatre, the Minerva Theatre, the Emerald Theatre, the Kohinoor Theatre and ultimately turned "Minerva" into an ideal stage of Bengal. But even without considering those, we may undoubtedly call Girish Chandra Ghose as the Father of the Bengali Stage from the time of *Sadhavār Ekādaśī*.

Chapter IX

Bengal Theatre

The year 1873 marks the stage of further innovation in the Bengali Stage. On the Sixteenth August, 1873, the "Bengal Theatre" was started at 9/3, Beadon Street, Calcutta, mainly through the exertion of Babu Sarat Chandra Ghose, whom the readers have found in the rôle of *Śakuntalā* at Chhatu Babu's House. He found an able co-adjutor in the well known actor Babu Beharilal Chatterjee, who had already figured in *Kulīnakulasarvasva* at the house of Jayram Bysak of Charakdanga, in *Veṇīsaṃhāra* at the house of Babu Kali Prasanna Sinha and also in *Śakuntalā* at Chhatu Babu's house, in female characters in all the three plays. It was at the last place, Sarat Babu met him and became friends. It was this Behari Babu, who had played the part of Bheemsingh in the Shobhabazar Raj House, in 1867, and as Indraneel in *Padmāvatī* and thus on the Bengali stage, he figured prominently long before Babu Girish Chandra Ghose came into the dramatic field.

The performance at Jorasanko by the National Theatrical company created a desire in Sarat Babu's

mind to start a public theatre and through the able collaboration of Beharilal, began to mature his plans. The open space in front of Chhatu Babu's house, where now the Beadon square post office stands, was taken lease of by Sarat Babu from his maternal grandfather Chhatu Babu and the stage was built there. The roof consisted of ordinary tiles and the plinth was kancha (of earth). Sarat Babu was the proprietor and Behari Babu became manager. The combination of both the organising capacity of Sarat Babu and the qualities of Beharilal as an actor, master and dramatist, made the *Bengal Theatre* popular and Beharilal remained the life long manager of the company, till April, 1901, when the *Bengal Theatre* had to be closed, owing to the lamented death of Beharilal. None continued to be the manager of a company at one stretch so long, as Beharilal. *Bengal Theatre* has, therefore, a continuous and growing record of its own, and Beharilal too must have his own place in the history of the Bengali stage, which is certainly not inconsiderable.

Actresses on the stage

Bengal Theatre, however, is credited with making certain reforms on the stage for which it deserves thanks. To turn theatre into a school of art, it is necessary to introduce female artists on the stage, as male actors can not do it for any length of

time,—boys from respectable classes can not be available and the standard is not reached even by the best boy artists. It was not also possible at that time to secure decent or respectable women for this purpose. Actresses had, therefore, to be secured from the women of the town and until and unless cultured women of broader views come forward from respectable families, theatres have no other option but to go on with actresses of the present status only. It was further when the National Theatre was started, we find some weighty arguments in the *Education Gazette* from one Khsetra Nath Bhattacherjee:

> "The more such theatres are started, acting will be improved and dramas composed in competition. The present theatres had no female artists on the staff. This will be soon considered as a defect and means will be sought to remedy this defect. Some of the prostitutes are trying to receive education. If a few of such educated women are secured, happy consequences will outweigh any mischief done."

These opinions carried much weight and the times also helped the introduction. It was at this time that Babu Ram Chand Mukherjee, Dewan of the famous millionaire Babu Ashutosh Dev had an opera party and some women appeared as actresses and singers there. The Oriental Theatre of Howrah also introduced females from the 15th

February, 1873 and the next step was taken by the National Liceum from the 7th Feb. * of the same year. We have also an account that from 7th May, 1873, a party opened *Vidyāsundar* under the name of Great India Theatre, where some actresses appeared in the roles of Vidyā and Mālinī.*

From the very beginning, Sarat Babu, through the suggestion of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Pandit Satyavrata Samasrami and Mr. O. C. Dutt, (Sarat Babu's brother-in-law), introduced females in the in the Bengal Theatre and four actresses were taken at first the person of Elokeshi, Jogattarini, Shyamasundari and Golap, though only two in the roles of Devajānī and Devikā (Śarmiṣṭhā's attendant) appeared on the stage on the opening night, *i.e.*, the 16th August. Thus, we find that as Lebedeff's theatre in 1795, Nabin's Theatre of 1833 and the above two theatres, were all very short-lived, Bengal Theatre alone is credited, as being the pioneer to introduce the important change. It is said that Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, who was one of the patrons and supporters of Sarat Babu from the time his Theatre was contemplated, severed his connection with it, at the introduction of females. The public and local papers were also indignant over it.

Michael Madhusudan Dutt wrote *Māyā-kānan*

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* Vide, *Indian Daily News* of contemporaneous period.

for representation in the opening night and the company purchased this piece and *Beesh Ki Dhanurgoon* from the author, but as the poet's death marked it as an omen (indeed, with death it began and with death it closed), they postponed it for a future performance and put *Śarmiṣṭhā* on the boards for the first night, applying all the sale proceeds to the aid of the orphans, left helpless by the death of their guide, patron and philosopher Madhusudan, the illustrious poet of Bengal.

Now, as to the success of the play and other details, we would here quote the remarks of a correspondent S. N. M. of Nandabag, Calcutta in *Englishman* * who wrote on the 19th Aug., 1873 :

> "On Saturday last, I went to see the first performance of Bengal Theatre in Beadon Street in front of the house of Ashutosh Dev. It is erected in the fashion of Lewis Lyceum Theatre Hall. On Saturday last, the celebrated *Śarmiṣṭhā* was brought on the stage for the benefit of the orphans of Michael M. S. Dutt and for the first time women were introduced as actresses. On Saturday last, there were only two females, who represented Devajani and Devika (Sharmistha's attendant). Their motions and speech were not quite easy and free. One Sagarika did well. Sukracharyya and Madhavya did well. Jayanti was, no doubt, gorgeously dressed, but was clumsy in movements. Great praise

* *Vide*, *Englishman*, 27th August, 1873.

is due to Babu Sarat Chandra Ghose, manager of the theatre and Babu Pyari Mohan Roy, Honorary Secretary for their noble exertions in the opening of the Theatre for the entertainment of the general public."

The *Englishman* of 18th August also had the following :—

"Theatricals are now the rage in Calcutta. A Bengali Theatrical Company has been formed... On last Saturday 16th, the theatre was opened ...The Gallery is well arranged and decent. Michael M. S. Dutt's classical drama *Śarmiṣṭhā* was selected for the first appearance. The actors performed their parts very creditably. The two women who were professional women were most successful—*we wish the drama would have done without actresses.*"

Amrita Bazar Patrika of 13th Bhadra, 1280 B. S., 28th Aug., 1873 writes :

A New Theatre has been opened in Calcutta by the name of Bengal Theatre. *Śarmiṣṭhā* was staged there for the last two Saturdays. The Theatrical Company has built a big house for performance and has made many excellent arrangements for the audience. They introduced two women on the stage in the parts of Devajani and Devika. Amongst the actors everyone except Jayanti acquitted himself well. When *Śarmiṣṭhā* was written, there was really no drama in Bengali language at that time, which was not permeated by Sanskrit. That Bengali is no more."

They next staged *Māyākānon*, which represents author's tragic life, on August and September, *Cakṣurdān*, on the 5th October, *Durgeṣnandinī* on the 20th October, 1873, in which Behari Babu played the part of Abhiram Swami and Haridas Das as Osman, whose stature, movements and the representation of the part were unique and have not been surpassed by any actor up to now including even Dani Babu.

The sales, however, were not satisfactory at the beginning, but the theatre began to get packed up houses, when on the 13th December, 1873, was put on boards "Mohanta on the stage"—*Ish* ! *Mohantar Eki Kāj*, representing how *Elokeshi* a youthful lady of prepossessing beauty living at Harinabhi in the district of Hugly was coaxed, cajoled and seduced to become a concubine of Mohanta Madhav Giri, through the assistance of the step-mother of the girl, against her consent, how the girl made a clean breast of every thing to her husband Nabin, when he came to the house of the father-in-law and how the husband. not finding a Palki to carry his wife through the foul play of the Mohanta, exclaimed "This peerless beauty and youth of my darling to be tested by a monkey !" and hacked her to pieces with a fishing dao (Bati), how he immediately appeared before the police and made true and full disclosures of all the incidents, sticking to the con-

fession before the Magistrate and how he was tried at the Hugly Sessions and sentenced to transportation for life. * Babu Beharilal Chatterjee, both in appearance and representation in the role of the Mohanta, was full of life.

This was the most sensational play at that time, which drew crowds into the theatre as the tale of the day was Mohanta and Elokeshi episode. History, however, repeated itself and more than half a century after, the affairs relating to the Mohanta also became the talk of the day, and the people not meekly submitting to the villainies of the head of a sacred place, and awakened to a sense of self-respect fought against the powers and riches of an unscrupulous Mohanta and at last forced him to come to his knees and submit to popular demands in September, 1924, and the leader of the struggle was no other person than the great and illustrious leader of the country, Deshabandhu Chittaranjan Das, but the chapter after was a cloudy one for Bengal.

In the year 1874, *Vidyā-sundar* of Maharaj Jatindra Mohan Tagore, *Mālatī-mādhav* on 21st May, *Navanāṭak* on 6th June, *Padmāvatī* on 4th July, *Puru-vikram* on 22nd August, *Ajmer Kumari* on 18th September, *Banger Parajay* on 14th Nov. were played. In this way the Bengal Theatre won

* Nabin was subsequently released from jail on mercy.

the praise of all in their attempts to entertain the public and was able to secure patronage of big persons through the untiring exertion of Sarat Babu and Beharilal.

In the year 1875, there was some change in the management. Towards the beginning of the year, on the 6th February, Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee, Kiran Ch. Banerjee and Amrita lal Bose and few actors from the Great National Opera Company joined the Bengal Theatre and performed *Satī Ki Kalaṅkinī* on the 6th February.* But about the time when *Malhar Rao Gaekwer* was staged on the 22nd May, Amrita Lal Bose left for Great National again. Nagendra Babu then formed an independent group under the name of New Aryan Theatre and with the help of Babu Upendra Nath Das staged his drama *Surendra-vinodinī Nāṭak*.† After this Upendra Babu too joined the Great National and we should take our readers there.

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* *Englishman*, 6th Eebruary, 1875. This had been played in Great National in 1874 before.

† *A. B. Patrika*, 19th August, 1875 and *Englishman*, 17th August, 1875.

Chapter X

The Great National Theatre

The other important public theatre was the *Great National Theatre*, which opened on the 31st December, 1873, with *Kāmya Kānon* and was associated with the name of Babu Bhuban Mohan Neogy to whom all credit of having the permanent stage of the *National Theatre* must go and who was protector of it for a number of years. It was built of wood after the pattern of *Lewis Theatre* at Chowringhee under the supervision of Babu Dharmadas Sur, the proprietor Bhuvan Mohan Neogy having spent Rs. 13000/- for the purpose. It is said that Bhuvan Babu, his relation Dharmadas and Babu Nagendra Nath Banerjee went to the *Bengal Theatre* to see a performance of "Mohanta on the stage" and were very much disappointed when they were not allowed to see the Manager after they failed to get tickets at any price, the rush on the night being very great. Bhuvan Mohan, a youth of generous but lavish spirits, had just inherited large property and had, as we have seen before, a great

taste for theatre. The result of the misunderstanding was the establishment of the *Great National Theatre* with Dharmadas Sur as Manager on a site which still adorns a flourishing and supporting stage with the *Minerva Theatre.* The land belonged to one Mahendra Das and a lease of it was taken for 5 years by Dharmadas at a monthly rent of Rs. 40/- in Neogi's name. The possession of the land was taken on 29th September, 1873, and scenes were painted by Dharmadas Sur with the help of Mr. D. Garrick. *

The foundation stone was laid in Sept. 29, 1873, under the presidency of Babu Novogopal Mitra. †

Kāmyakānan ‡ was taken from a fairy tale, and was run on a competition with Bengal's *Māyākānan*, which did not meet with much acclamation. § The welcome song was sung by 50 voices in a chorus and a farce *Young Bengal* was also in the bill, but the opening night was marked by a mishap which forbode its future fate. It was very curious that when the hero of the play Babu Amritalal Bose was worshipping the Goddess Kālī before the sacri-

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* Dharmadas's Autobiography.

† *Englishman*, 3rd Oct., 1873.

‡ Amrita Babu says—it was composed by the joint exertion of himself, Nagendra Babu, his brother Devendra Babu and another Devendra, a Medical College student. *Vide*, also his *reminiscences*.

ficial fire on the stage, people all round cried out 'fire, fire', the wings having caught fire elsewhere. There was a great commotion amongst the audience, who began to find out the easiest means to escape. The accident was due to the fact that no chimney was set in on the gas box by the side of the window and owing to high pressure, fire broke out. The loss, however, was not much, slight repairs having restored the whole thing. There was, however, no further repetition of this drama, as it was considered inauspicious.

The spectators made a great clamour for the return of money, but were pacified with great difficulty by Ardhendu Babu, who was present here not as actor but as a sympathiser. Fire is a great curse to theatres. We have seen how Chowringhee and Sansoucie Theatres were closed down owing to fire and about half a century after in 1922, another sad fire completely burnt Minerva down, though the proprietor with great tact and perseverance was able to open it again at the same site.

Babu Nagendra Banerjee was the Secretary of the above Great National and his brother Devendra Babu, a Director.

On the 1st January, 1874, there was a performance of *Nīladarpaṇa*, held at the Fancy Fair, of Belvedere as the Bengal Theatre, conducted with actresses, was not considered with favour. On the

10th January, *Vidhavā-vivāha Nāṭak* was played and *Praṇaya-parīkṣā* was played on the 17th Jan., when the scenic grandeur was really marvellous.

On the 3rd January, 1874, The Old National Theatre also played *Nīladarpaṇa* and *Āmi ta Unmādinī*—'I am a mad woman'—to conclude *Mohanta in a penitent state* and the most successful scenes of "Bhārat-Mātā" and "Cymbeline" (Kusum Kumāri) on the 17th January, and also Manomohan Bose's *Praṇaya-parīkṣā* These performances, though enacted in a rickety and shabby stage and not fetching much money, were really wonderful as the famous *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 15th Jan., 1874 (3rd Magh, 1280, B. S.) speaks of both the National and Great National :

> "The Great National has got its own theatre-building and stage and scenes are very nice. The National has no house and its scenes are shabby and require a change. The Orchestra of Great National consists in the English Band but all the same is not sweet. The Orchestra of the National is sweet and one would like it to continue, and above all, the actors of the National are so well trained that they can not be matched with those of the National."

Thus, while Great National, inspite of its house and scenes, could not make much impression on the audience, and while Bengal's *Durgeś-nandinī*, with Sarat Chandra Ghose, an expert rider on horseback,

was drawing crowded houses, Girish Chandra Ghosh's help was considered indispensably necessary and he too ungrudgingly rendered his services. On the 24th January, *Kṛṣṇakumārī Nāṭak* was staged and *Kapālkuṇḍalā* was staged with great success on 7th Feb., 1874. Girish then dramatised two well known novels of Mr. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Mṛṇālinī* and *Viṣavṛkṣa*. These two dramas kept up the imagination of the spectators for some time and Girish also coached the parts and appeared in leading rôles. All artists of both "National" and "Great National" gathered at the Great National Stage under the leadership of Girish and enacted a performance, which has ever remained incomparable. *Mṛṇālinī* was staged on the 14th Feb., 1874, and the cast was as follows :

Pashupati	...	Girish Chandra Ghosh.
Hrisikesh	...	Ardhendu Sekhar Mustafi.
Hem Chandar	...	Nagendra Nath Banerjee.
Digvijay	...	Amritalal Bose.
Byomkesh	...	Amritalal Mukherjee (Bel Babu)
Baktier Khiliji	...	Mahendralal Bose.
Janardan	...	Radha Prasad Basak.
Mrinalini	...	Basanta Kumar Ghosh.
Girijaya	...	Ashutosh Bandyopadhyaya.
Manoramā	...	Kshetra Mohan Ganguli.
Mṛṇālinī	...	Mahendra Nath Sinha.

Here Girish surpassed his Neemchand, Wood and Bheem Singh and showed talents of a very

high order. Babu Amrita Lal Bose said, at Kantalpara in 1917, during the first Bankim Sammilani, "Girish's voice was so powerful, distinct and sonorous and so masterly his acting that for this part alone, an artist would have been honoured with titles in other countries." He says also in his reminiscences, "Girish's artistic movements in the last scene, while he embraced Astabhuja in the flames, produced a thrilling sensation even on us, what to speak of the spectators." What an expression displayed in his face when he, for the first time, got Manorama's acquaintance in her words that she was Keshav's daughter—his own married wife ! Ardhendu also joined Great National for the first time as Hrisikesh and all actors did well, but special mention might be made of Manorama of whom the advertisement used to run as "Look —look to your Manorama, she jumps at the fire !"

As a dramatist also there was indication of Girish's genius, when on the last scene Pasupati was frantic for Manorama saying, "Leave me, leave, Manorama is in the room, she must be saved." This was Girish's invention.

The party next staged *Viṣavṛkṣa* on the 7th March, 1874, with Girish as Nagendra Nath and when *Kapālakuṇḍalā* was again staged on the 4th April, 1874, Babu Amrita Lal Bose said :

> "Nagen Babu was both a handsome person and a good actor. He rendered the part of Nava-

kumar with great credit. Matilal's Kapalik was superb. None has been able to surpass him upto now in his Torap and Kapalik. Bel Babu and Kshetra Babu did marvellous, the former as Kapālakuṇḍalā and the latter as Manorama. These two used to monopolise the main female characters. Bel Babu was without a rival in emotional and Kshetra Babu in mild female characters."

Kamalinī (or Daughter of a Kulin) was staged on the 30th May, 1874, when the theatre remained in abeyance for some time, travelling in Mafussil, * once or twice, after which we come to the period of great transition on the stage.

Inspite of the marvellous acting by Girish and his colleagues, the Great National laboured under serious disadvantages in acting without female actresses and Bengal Theatre therefore began to command a greater sale. *Durgeśa-nandinī* was played here on the 20th Dec., 1873 in competition with its rival, but besides female actresses, Babu Sarat Ghosh's "Jagat Sinha" at *The Bengal* was a treat. His princely figure and his dexterity as a rider on the stage made the performance more attractive. Then again when *Mṛṇālinī* was staged at the Bengal theatre also (the manuscripts according to some being supplied by Babu Kiran Chandra Banerjee, who appeared as Pashupati), the songs of

* *Sādhāraṇī*, 5th July, 1874.

Golapsundari (afterwards Sukumari Dutt) used to produce a thrill to the audience. The Great National began, thus, to fall down in competition. Dharmadas could not meet the situation ; so in his place Nagendra Babu was appointed the Manager, with his brother Devendra Nath Banerjee as Director. The absence of female characters being thus keenly felt, the Great National in Devendra Nath's Opera *Satī ki Kalaṅkinī or Is she chaste or not* * staged on Sept., 14th, 1874, introduced the following actresses—Rajkumari, Kshetramani, Jadumani, Luxmimani, Narayani and Harimati.

Our readers will excuse us for making some references here about these actresses. Rajkumari as a heroine was successful, but of Kshetramani it may be said that none equalled her in histrionic arts. On a later occasion His Excellency Lord Dufferin, the Viceroy of India and Sir Rivers Thompson, the Lieutenant Governor, on seeing her play the part of Jhee (maid servant) in the farce of *Vivāhabibhrāṭ* of Amritalal, congratulated her on the success she achieved, remarking, very few actresses could equal her in acting even in England. In comic parts she was in all respects a match to Ardhendu Sekhar and the two together could reproduce Pantomimes admirably, sometimes on prompting and sometimes without it and in tragic parts she

* *A. B. Patrika*, 17th Sept., 1874.

surpassed other colleagues. For her, to represent best art, one pose or expression was quite enough. As an orphan poor girl leading an old beggar in *Sarat-sarojini*, finding no juice in a piece of dried sugarcane and disgust on the occasion thereby, used to be shown by one look only.

Sometimes after, Kadambini also joined this theatre and was set up for leading parts. But the next two actresses who soon joined the Great National, Sukumari from Bengal, and Binodini just fresh (the latter being still alive), were historically important. Both rose to the top of the profession and Binodini was once considered to be the *Prima donna* of the Bengali Stage.

Satī ki Kalaṅkinī with Raja in the rôle of Radhika was much appreciated and was soon followed by other performances, which have become matters of history now. We shall relate those in the next chapter.

About its success, Girish says :

> Great National won much reputation by staging *Sati ki Kalaṅkinī* under the direction of Madan mohan Burman. *

Indeed, Bhuvan Neogi, the proprietor, spared no pains or money to make the play a success, but the introduction of women was not agreeable to

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* Girish's preface to Binodini's autobiography.

Dharmadas and Ardhendu, who went out under the leadership of Matilal Sur and showed some performances at Dacca, Berhampore, Krishnanagore, Ranaghat, Birbhum and Bogra under the name "National", but as Ardhendu's mother was in death-bed, he was helped by Bhuvan Mohan and was not allowed any more to go outside.* He too joined the theatre with women.

Next, *Purūvikram* † spread reputation far and wide but we reserve our comment for the next chapter and other performances do not deserve mention except *Rudrapāl*, which was a translation of Macbeth, and on the first night (31st Oct., 1874), Colonel Hyde was present and the advertisement ran as "Macbeth, with an original music from Lockes." Rani Oilabila, a very difficult part, was rendered by Kshetramani in *Purūvikram*.

From monetary considerations, however, these two dramas could not interest the spectators much, and they wanted another opera like *Satī ki Kalaṅkinī* and *Ananda Kanan* by Lakshmi Narayan Chakravarty, brought on the stage on 14th and 21st Nov.,‡ 1874, that fetched them some money. A review

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* *Rangabhumi*, 23rd March, 1901.

† *Rangabhumi*, 23rd March, 1901, Ardhendu's *reminiscences*. On that night of *Puūrvikram*, Bengal played *Durgeśnandinī* and *Opera Troubles*.

‡ *Englishman*, 24th Nov., 1874.

by *Englishman* of this opera gives a bit of contemporary history.

> "The Great National Theatre—The opera *Ananda Kanan* (The Bower of Bliss) or *Madaner Digvijaya* was performed at the National Theatre for the second time on Saturday last before a good, though not a crowded house. The performance was fairly done, the actors and actresses acquitting themselves creditably. Among them the following deserve special mention—Rati and Sauti represented by Jadumani, Kavita and Kamala by Raj Kumari, Ahmika by Khatoo, Chapalata by Haridashi, Lila by Kadu, Sangit by Hari Charan Banerjee, Madan by Suresh Mitter, Basanta by Nagendra Nath Banerjee, Aviveka by Ardhendu Mustafi and Narayan by Amrita Lal Bose."

Both *Satī ki Kalaṅkinī* and *Ananda Kanan* bringing some money, Nagen Babu considered, success was due to him and insisted on an agreement being drawn by the proprietor, that in case the latter dismissed him, an indemnity of Rs. 20000/- would have to be paid. Bhuvan Babu refusing the proposal, Nagendra Nath left the theatre along with his brother Kiran Chandra Banerjee, Babu Amrita Lal Bose, Madan Mohan Burman, Jadumani and Kadambini.*

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* On the 9th Jany, 1875, at the Lewis Theatre Royal under the name "Great National Opera Company", Nagendra Babu did marvellously as the drunkard in

As we described in page 227, they afterwards joined the Bengal Theatre.

Great National experienced a bitter time with this change and we can not enlighten our readers about internal troubles more than what appeared in the *Indian Daily News* of 2nd Dec., 1874 :

> "A correspondent mentions that a warrant has been issued against one prominent character connected with it, for his apprehension on a charge of criminal misappropriation, the amount of defalcation is stated to be Rs. 10000/-, which is probably an exaggerrtion as is also the statement that a young native gentleman has been induced to incur debts, in connection with the theatre, to the extent of Rs. 50000/-."

There was really a suit and a very prominent notary of the town (afterwards a title-holder) was indicted for perjury (making false statements about Bhuvan Mohan).

Śatrusaṅhār was staged on 12th Dec., and *Vaṅger Sukhāvasān*, on 26th Dec., 1874.

Dharmadas was next taken in as the manager, who now formed a strong corps with Mahendra Lal, Matilal, Bel Babu, Kshetramani and Golap Sundari.

Kiñcit Jalayoga and Jadumani as Radhika in *Satī ki Kalaṅkinī*. Maharaja of Jodhpore was present. *Englishman*, 12th Jan, 1875.

Sometime after, Amritlal Bose, Madan Mohan Burman and Kadambini also returned as stated before, to the Great National.

Dharmadas got the right of staging a new drama *Saratsarojini* from the pen of Babu Upendra Nath Das, although known as written by one Durgadas Babu. It was staged at the Great National on 2nd Jan., 1875, under the distinguished presence and patronage of H. H. the Maharaja Harendra Krishna Singh of Bettia. The house was crowded to suffocation and on the 2nd night a large number of intending visitors had to go disappointed for want of accommodation and the parts were very well rendered. It was unanimously pronounced to be one of the most original and powerful productions of the age. Shooting on the stage was shown for the first time.*

In a later issue, the *Englishman* praised highly Mahendra Babu (representing Sarat Kumar), Kiran Chandra Banerjee, Jagattarini, Binduvasini and Kshetramani and specially the songster Jadumani.†

After having played one or two stage shows, the Great National, with the assistance of Babu Girish Chandra Das, an officer of the Calcutta Currency, then on special deputation, went to Delhi in March,

* *A. B. Patrika*, 14th Jan, 1874.

† *Englishman*, 17th Aug., 1875.

1875. The party stayed at Delhi for about 10 days, then went to Lahore, stayed for about a month and created an impression there. It then came to Meerut, to Agra, Brindavan and the whole party then came to Lucknow.*

A portion of the company showed performances at 'Home' also, under Mahendra Bose, as manager.

The return of Dharmadas's party in July, 1875, after a successful tour was noticed in the pages of the *Englishman* as follows :

> "The portion of the company, lately giving so many successful performances in Delhi, Lahore etc., so favourably noticed in the papers having just returned to Calcutta, the performances henceforth will be on grand scale. The orchestra under the direction of Madan Mohan Burman is a charming one."

On 3rd July, 1875, *Padminī* by Mahendra Basu was staged for his benefit, Mahendra Babu himself appearing in the rôle of Bheem Sinha. The well known "Bharat Sangit" song was sung by Jadumani. Gopal Chandra Mazumdar appeared as Alauddin.

After this, for about 4 or 5 months the theatre remained in the hands of Babu Krishnadhan Banerjee of Shyampukur as lessee, with Babu Mahendra Lal Bose as his Manager. The reason of

* *Indian Mirror*, 7th April, 1875.

this change was that Bhuvan Babu by the long absence of the company not only lost at home but also did not get anything from abroad, though the Manager was said to have made profits and in disgust he leased his theatre to a third party.*

After some performances, it was seen that Krishnadhan was in debt and unable to pay rent. Bhuvan Babu, therefore, took the theatre back into his hands and made Babus Upendra Nath Das and Amrita Lal Bose as Director and Manager, respectively.

Great National Theatre staged *Hīrakcūrṇa Nāṭak* on 23rd Dec., *Surendravinodini* on 31st Dec., 1875 and *Prākṛta Bandhu* by Brajendra Kumar Roy on 8th Jan., 1876; but the inauspicious star in the fortunes of Bhuvan Mohan was in ascendancy and he fell into such great difficulties that he lost money, energy and spirits and the result was that he had to close theatre ere long. We shall take our readers to the next chapter for those incidents of great public interest.

* *Englishman*, 7th August, 1875.

Chapter XI

THE DRAMATIC PERFORMANCES ACT

The circumstances that led to the passing of it

For some time and with greater zeal since Mr. Upendra Nath Das and Babu Amrita Lal Bose took up the management, the Great National Theatre began to stage dramas of sensational interest and acquired a notoriety. Incidents succeeded in quick succession and the authorities found themselves difficult to cope with the situation. Legislation followed and the Dramatic Performances Act restricting the free and fair growth of *the stage* was soon passed. The Act is still in force and it hangs like a veritable sword of Damocles even today on the Bengali Stage. The history of this period is a very memorable one, and we propose to narrate the causes *seriatim*.

I. NATIONAL DRAMAS

The first tragedy chosen for the National Theatre was, as we have seen, *Nīladarpana Nāṭak*. It was repeated in the Great National Theatre also. It was really a drama of the national interest. It

touched every Bengali heart. It stirred up the audience both Indians and Europeans alike, and sometimes they were beside themselves with emotion. The Great National Theatre went to different places in 1875 with Dharmadas Babu as manager. It gave its performances at Agra, Delhi, Mathura, Brindavan, Lucknow and everywhere the scenes of oppression by Messrs. Wood and Rogue upon the innocent ryots created great sensation amongst the audience. When they appeared on the stage in their respective rôles, Babu Nilmadhav Chakravarty as Golak Bose, Nagendra Banerjee as Navin, Babu Ardhendu Shekhar as Mr. Wood, Babu Matilal Sur as Torap, Babu Avinash Chandra Kar, Assistant Manager as Mr. Rogue, Kshetramani as Savitri, Kadambini as Sairindhri, Binodini as Saralata, Lakshmi as Kshetramoni and Narayani as Padimayrani, everybody was pleased as to the manner in which they acquitted themselves in their alloted parts. But the trouble arose during a performance at Lucknow, when Mr. Rogue fell upon Kshetramani, big with child and the poor girl piteously begged to be released crying in utter helpless manner and saying, "Saheb, father (Saheb Tumi Āmār Bābā), I am your daughter, leave me, thou art my father," but Rogue dragged her by force brutally taunting at her last remarks saying, "I wish to be the father of your child" ("Tomār Cheler Bābā haite icchā

hoeche"). At that time Torap entered the room in company with Navin Madhav, by breaking open the window-panes and while Navin raised Kshetramani in his arms and departed and Torab slapped and kicked Mr. Rogue, the European audience was so much excited that some of them actually ran towards the stage to fall upon Matilal Sur, who appeared in the rôle of Torap. They were, at last, pacified with great difficulty. The District Magistrate ordered the performance at once to be stopped, advised the party to start for Calcutta, and with police help made them leave the station peacefully, with their bags and baggages. *

That was the stir, *Nīldarpaṇa* created amongst the audience, yet strictly speaking it was not a national drama in the sense it had no political goal to achieve, nor any political propaganda to make, but it laid before the public the heartless oppression of the indigo planters upon the helpless ryots, so that therein might be a speedy end to all such cruelties.

The object was no doubt laudable and noble but as we have shown in page 98, in no way it could be called seditious, nor was it an attempt for the political uplift of the mass. The first national dramatic piece in the aforesaid sense was, therefore, "Bhart-matar Bilap", or the lamentations of Mother India, staged on the 15th February,

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* *Reminiscences* of Binodini Dasi.

1873 at the Hindu Mela (Fair) under the auspices of the National Theatre. It represented Mother India, pale and morose at the miseries, poverty and degradation of her sons—dull, pathetic and quite reluctant to make any effort whatsover. The famous song "Malina Mukha-candramā Bhārata Tomāri" ("O India, thy moonlike face is dark with sorrow"), used to move the audience to tears. This piece was written at the suggestion of Babu Sishir Kumar Ghosh, the famous founder and Editor of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, although printer's name only was given as Kiran Chandra Banerjee.* The songs were borrowed from Thakurbari, whose authorship was attributed to Satyendra Nath, the eldest son of Maharshi Devendranath. We give below the summary of the piece played on the occasion:

"There the mother sits dark and solemn with grief like the moon over-cast with clouds of sorrow, and resting her cheek on her left palm":

Her hair is dishevelled and coarse ;
She is clad in rags.
And iron bracelets she wears on her wrists ;
There she stands lost in thoughts.
Like the sad Meditation's self,
Her children like skeletons covered in skin.
Alas! sleep by her lying prostrate on dust.

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* *A. B. Patrika*, 10th Falgun, 1279, B. S.

Suddenly, alighting aloft the sky,
And the goddess of Destiny appeared :
Her graceful feet planted on a full blown lotus.
But, lo ! she burst into tears, crying,
"Alas ! Seeing thy sorrowful face, O, Bharata,
Tears gush through my eyes both day and night.
My heart breaks seeing thee,
Thus plunged into an ocean of grief.
Hearing that sweet voice, She looked up :
But being blind with tears,
She could not read her fate.
The divine lady broke forth again,
"O Bharata ! Look to your children hungry and lean.
All are buried in death-like sleep,
The sight is quite painful to see ;
So I retire from thy place.
After some time her stupor broke
She tried to rouse her sons from sleep,
But from lethargy they wanted not to rise,
Seeing that the Mother burst into tears,
When at last their sleep was broken
They were sore pressed with hunger and thirst;
They asked for food.
"Where will you get it now ?"
Replied Mother with a sigh ;
"Fortune has left you for good
And now she is in the queen's palace,
Standing by the sea."

"God save the queen,
May victory attend on her,
May she give shelter to all."
Thus they sang.
Then a white man red with rage,
Cried out, "Rebellion rank!"
And kicked at the children of the soil.
Mother knelt and wept,
She cursed her lamentable fate,
And wept her appeals to God.

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika** published the full play in Bengali and stated that when this piece was performed at the Hindu Mela on the 15th Feb., 1873, the whole audience numbering about 1500 persons shed tears and their hairs stood on their end.

It was, as *Bangadarshan* (of Kartic, 1280 B. S.) stated, "a Burlesque or allegory. Mother India, the presiding deity of fortune, some Indians and two Europeans, Patience and Courage were its characters. It was a tolerably good production."

The above named drama was followed by *Hemalatā Nāṭak* by Babu Haralal Roy, Head master, Hare school, and was staged on the 13th December, 1873, at the Jorasanko "National." Babu Mahendra Lal Bose appeared in the main rôle of Satyasakha and Dr. R. G. Kar as Satyasakha's mother.

* 10th Falgun, 1279 B. S.

The Great National Theatre, as we have seen before, was started afterwards at 6, Beadon Street and the above three dramas staged in the "National" of the old Jorasanko were revived in the Great National also.

We shall now confine our attention only to the *Great National.*

In the year 1875, *Puru-vikram,** *Bharate Yavan* and *Banger Sukhavasan* were staged at the Great National Theatre on the 3rd October, 7th November and 26th December, respectively. These plays appealed to the patriotic feelings of the Bengalis ;—*Bharate Yavan* related the historic resistance of Prithviraj against the Moslem invaders, *Banger Sukhavasan* was based upon Baktiar Khilji's conquest of Bengal and *Puru-vikram* from the pen of Jyotirindra Nath Tagore described the heroic deeds of that heroic king Porus, who bravely fought against Alexander the Great, Emperor of Greece. Mahendra Lal Bose acted the part of Alexander the Great, Nagendra Nath Banerjee that of Porus and Srimati Kshetramani Devi that of Ailobila, the queen. There was a song in that drama that vibrated the patriotic cords of the Bengali audience, and we give below a summary of that in our English:

**Puru-vikram* was produced very successfully at the G. N. Theatre, both actors and actresses playing their respective parts well. *Englishman*, 1875, 6th October.

Let the children of Bhārata in one voice declare
Which land is like her ?
What hill is like the Himalayas.
Which land is so rich with
Such streams and mines of gems.*
Let us sing of her glory.
May victory ever attend on her.
There is nothing to fear.
Let us sing of her victory for ever
Where the woman is so chaste and fair
Like Sita, Savitri, Sarmistha and Damayanti ?
Let us sing of her victory.
Have you forgotten the heroes
Bhishma, Drona, Bhima and Arjuna the brave ?
Why do you fear the enemy ?
Virtue always treads in virtue's path,
Division has made you weak,
But united will grow strong.
Thus sing of victory to Bhārata,
Her countenance will again be bright.

Similarly in Scene I, Act III when king Porus was urging his men to fight against the Greeks reminding every one of his duty towards the father-land, we find greater inspiration:

*In this vein the famous song of D. L. Roy in his *Shajahan* ran :
"In this world of ours full of wealth, bliss and corn will you get a land like this ?"

"Awake, Arise!
"Look, the cruel Yavanas
"Trespass into your home;
Be of one mind,
Liberate the Mother-land
Delay is intolerable
Advance with the banner of victory in your hand.
What is life without freedom ?
Fie on him who wants to live
Being robbed of his liberty
It is better to die,
But let Liberty and Honour live in the land.
Come and swear,
Either must win or must die.
Either kill the Yavanas
Or follow death yourself.

Then followed in quick succession other 'National' dramas at the Great National Theatre, in 1875.

Of them the following deserve special notice, *Hīrak-cūrṇa Nāṭak*, *Sarojinī Nāṭak* and the *Surendra-vinodinī Nāṭak*. Similar other dramas like the *Malhar Rao*, *Vīrnārī*, the *Ajmer Kumārī* and *Banger Parajaya* were also staged at the Bengal Theatre.

Hīrak-cūrṇa was written by Sj. Amritalal Bose, and was staged on the 17th June, 1875. It represented the farcical 'trial' of Malhar Rao Gaekwar of Baroda, who was forced to abdicate on the 29th April, 1875, for having attempted to poison Col,

R. Phayre, British Political Agent of the Baroda Court.

The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* commenting upon the play observed that despite its good many merits, its effect was marred by its undignified attacks hurled against Babu Kristo Das Paul, the Editor of the *Hindu Patriot*, who supported the "Trial".

Hīrak-curṇa was followed by Jyotirindra Nath Tagore's *Sarojinī Nāṭak*. It was a famous production of its time and its songs and sentiments became the literary possession of the day.

It narrated the story of the historic fight of Rana Lakshman Singh of Chitore against Ala Uddin Khiliji—the Pathan ruler of Delhi. There was a song in the drama by the Rajput women dressed in red-bordered saris and adorned with floral wreaths about to fling themselves on the blazing pyre to burn to death and save them from the polluted touch of the Mahomedan victors. The song used to kindle patriotic fervour in the heart of every Bengali spectator. The famous song ran thus :

Jval, jval citā dvigun dvigun
    Parāṇ sapive vidhavā vālā,
Jvaluk, jvaluk citār āgun
    Juḍāvi ekhani prāṇer jvālā.
Dekh re yavan dekh re torā,
    Ye jvālāy hṛdaya jvālāli save,
Sākṣi rahiven devatā tār
    Er pratiphal bhugite have.

In English the song reads thus :

> Blaze up ye funeral pyre, blaze up in double the
> glare,
> The widowed woman will cast her life.
> Let the flame of the funeral pyre burn and leap,
> It will soon extinguish the burning of heart.
> Look, ye Yavanas, look, but here, what fire
> have you enkindled in our bosoms,
> Gods will bear witness to this
> And soon you will reap the fruit of your
> deeds.

There was also another scene in the drama, which greatly excited the audience, they even seemed to forget themselves in great excitement. This was when *Sarojinī* (the heroine) was brought before a sacrificial post (to which animals for sacrifice are tied down) and Rana consented to her being sacrificed for the deliverance of the country. Ranadhir was looking sharp and Bhairavacharya, the disguised spy from the court of the Emperor Alauddin approached her with sword in his hand. Then all on a sudden, Bijay Singh rushed into the scene crying, "All's conspiracy, Bhairav is not a brahmin, but a Mahamedan spy from Delhi." At this, many of the spectators, out of emotion, jumped upon the stage to save Sarojini's life and some even fainted. The famous actress Binodini told us that occasionally some of them had to be nursed by the

theatrical staff till they regained their consciousness.*

As soon as Babu Upendra Nath Das became the director of the Great National, he began to revive the martial dramas of Jyotirindra Nath.

The third play *Surendra-vinodinī* has become quite a history, for the trouble it put its authors into; but of this, later on.

Now, these dramas produced a tremendous effect on the minds of the people, and naturally attention of the Government was drawn towards them. Espionage from one side and suspicion from the other, were much in evidence. Even friends were sometimes mistaken for spies. An Englishman, Mr. Hunter who liked the play, one day came to witness the performance, but finding that his presence was looked upon with some suspicion, he exclaimed "I have come to see the play, not to arrest you."

The hon'ble Mr. Hobbhouse, the law member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council, wanted special powers of the Executive quoting history that in times of excitement there was no surer method of directing public feeling against individuals or classes or the Government itself, than by exhibiting them

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*Mati Sur appeared in the role of Lakshman Singh, Gopal Das as Bhairavacharya, Amrita Bose as Bijay Singh, Mahendra Bose as Ranadhir Singh and Binodini as Sarojini.

on the stage in an odious light and the best remedy was therefore to suppress such dramas.

No doubt, Mr. Hobbhouse, while presenting the Bill in the Supreme Legislative Council, presided over by his Excellency the Viceroy, on the 14th March 1876, did not mention about these dramas in particular, but put clearly before the house, when Sir Richard Temple, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, was also present in the Council, the following :

"Now it had been found in all times and in all countries that no greater stimulus could be supplied to excite the passions of mankind than that supplied by means of the drama and that no feat was too difficult for a dramatist, who could produce any effect he pleased on the minds of the spectators :

Sequius irritant animos demissa per aures
Suam que sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus.*"

II. ARRIVAL OF THE PRINCE OF WALES.

Though the staging of the National dramas was not sought as an apology for passing the Dramatic Performances Act, the incidents relating to the Prince's visit in the house of a Bhowanipore gentleman were, however, so made.

It was about this time that his Royal Highness

*_Englishman_, 15th March, 1876.

the Prince Of Wales (afterwards, King Emperor Edward VII, grandfather of our King Emperor Edward VIII and George VI) visited Calcutta on December 23, 1875.* Amongst his famous hosts, Babu Jagadananda Mukherjee, a famous vakil of the Calcutta High Court, and a member of the Bengal Legislative Council, entertained the Prince in his residential house at Bakulbagan, Bhowanipore, on the 3rd January, 1876 (20th Paush, 1282 B. S.). The Prince was loyally received by the ladies of his zenana and presented with an emerald necklace, one pair of gold bangles, one gold neck chain and some pairs of Dacca embroidery muslins.† Lord Northbrooke, the then viceroy is said to have protested at the Prince's reception at a Hindu zenana and his resignation was rumoured.|| Mrs. Jagadananda Mukherjee, with her retinue and neighbouring friends, was all attention to the Prince, received him with conchshells, and offered *varan* with the joyous shouts *ulu*, peculiar to Hindu females on festive

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* The Prince arrived near Diamond Harbour on the 22nd December, 1875, through the steamer Serapin and arrived at the Prinseps ghat on 23rd December, at 4-30 P. M. (Contemporaneous newspapers).

† Diary of Jagadananda Mukherjee, published in page 54 of Nandavansa by Mr. Chandra Sekhar Mukherjee.

|| It is said that the Prince went to the Zenana, leaving the ladies that accompanied him, behind, and His Excellency as a mark of displeasure, wanted to tender resignation. *A. B. Patrika*, 7th Magh, 1282 B. S.

occasions. The prince seemed to have been astonished at the jewellery and ornaments, which Mrs. Mukherjee and her companions put on their person and is said to have exclaimed, while parting, to Jagadananda Babu :

"I see no difference between your house and my Windsor palace."

An account of the visit of the prince, though a digression, we give here below from an account of the prince's private secretary :

3rd January, 1876.

How it came about I do not exactly know but it is probably that the prince expressed a wish to see the Zenana of some respected native and that the wish was made to the worthy Hindu of Bhowanipore. Mr. Mukherjee was too happy to gratify it to-day. Miss Baring, Lady Temple, to-day Miss Milmen, Lady Stuart Hogg and others had perhaps some part in this pourparlers. There were hundreds of children assembled to see the prince arrive ; most of the little ladies held pretty bouquets, with which, out of local devotion, to pelt the prince. These children may develop into Hindu Blooms and establish women's Rights associations unless their wild shrieks of liberty were silenced into the leaden flood of caste and custom, which has drowned so much thought and life in India century after century. Instead of salutes and flourishes or bell peeling the Hindus use conches to announce the arrival of guests ; the noise of

these natural horns makes one rej
is not among the Tritons. These we
often and long for there were false
the prince coming but at last his car
in sight and there was conch-blov
Royal Highness did not appear in th
attire, which Mrs. Mukherjee and
friends, no doubt, thought a prince should wo....
Whether Babu Jogadananda Mukherjee will
ever get over the wrath of his co-religionists
for the doings of this day, time only can show.
There is one fact revealed by the manner in
which the occurrence was accepted by those
concerned. Hindu ladies at all events do not
consider strict seclusion all essential to their
happiness. But it is dangerous to argue from
a particular to the universal and so it will be
safer perhaps to say that some Hindu ladies
do not dislike being seen at all events by a
Prince of Wales.*

This incident, however innocent, was severely commented upon and raised a storm of protest throughout the length and breadth of the country and the press and the stage equally joined in expressing severe condemnation of Jagadananda Babu's action. The *Hindu Patriot* regretted "that the national feeling had been outraged at the price the Babu paid for his

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* Travels of the prince—by W. H. Russel, honorary private secretary to H. R. H. Prince of Wales and member of the prince's suite accompanying him to India—Published in 1877, page 378—379.

honour." *The Patrika* was rather more outspoken ; on the 23rd Paush, 1282 B. S., it wrote "The Hindu society can bear all oppression, but no shock to its womanhood. Any person, who allows the family to be defiled from outside, is a disgrace, nay a great enemy, to the Hindu society."

Indeed this action of his, received the strongest censure from the society. Satirical songs poured forth from all quarters and the Great National Theatre, at the earliest opportunity, took up the matter, prepared and staged a farce *Gajadānanda* on the 19th February, 1876, written by Upendra Babu, along with the performance of "*Sarojinī Nāṭak*". The prologue and the songs now without trace, were all the composition of Girish Chandra Ghosh. The song that was put into the mouth of the ladies, while moving round the prince, ran thus :

"Can't knock about any more
My feet are aching
Why do you fall on my person
Just move a little slowly
I can't walk with pitcher in my hand
Just wait a moment.
I am wet with perspiration."
Olo dhīre calo

This was followed by quoted poem "*Vājī-māt* of the well known poet Hem Chandra Banerjee

satirising his brother-pleader as "Long live, thou son of a Mukherjee."

The Government of Bengal seemed to be highly offended with the above representation on the stage and tried to prevent its repetition. On the 23rd February, 1876, (Wednesday) at the benefit night of Babu Amrita Lal Bose when performance of *Satī ki kalaṅkinī* and a musical concert were arranged, *Gajadānanda* too was brought on the stage under a new name and in a somewhat different garb.*

The police were present on this occasion also. Then for the 26th February, "new and able work" *Karnāt-kumār* (The Prince of Karnat) was put on boards to conclude with the above farce under again a new name *Hanumān-caritra* (Monkey's character), when Mr. Das, the Director, was to have delivered a stirring speech in English. This time, too, the police forbade its repetition. The troupe next arranged to hold on the 1st March, a performance of *Surendra-vinodinī* along with the above farce under a queer name *Police of Pig and Sheep,* criticising the spirit of Sir Stuart Hogg, Commissioner of Police, and Mr. Lamb, Superintendent of Police, for having taken up a hostile attitude. The joint attraction for a railway

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* Correspondence of G. C. De in *Indian Mirror*, Feb. 27, 1876.

ain on the stage and the Director's speech in
nglish '*on actresses*', as well as the farce in a new
ame, drew a very crowded house at that night.

The various poems on the topic, composed on
e period, the farce staged at the Great National
nder different names and the stirring speeches of
Ir. U. N. Das made the city too hot for Jagada-
anda Babu and after the third performance was
dvertised, Government finding that the police has
een calumniated, came to his rescue, in right earnest
nd set its machinery in force in favour of the
rince's distinguished host. On the representation
f the Government of Bengal, His Excellency Lord
Iorthbrooke, the Viceroy, issued an Ordinance, from
imla as an emergency measure, under the Govern-
nent of India Act, with a view to give the Govern-
nent of Bengal, power to control the dramatic
erformances. This was to remain in force for two
nonths till the end of May, until a new law was
assed by the Viceregal (Supreme) Legislative
Council, on the subject. Armed with this authority
Mr. Lambert, Deputy Commissioner and Mr. Lamb,
Superintendent of Police with Babu Amrita Lal
Dutt, Inspector, Shampukur Thana, came to
he Great National Theatre on the 1st March,
1876, when the performance was going on
nd in absence of the honorary director Mr.
Upendra Nath Das, owing to mortification,
handed over the order to Babu Amritalal Bose,

the manager, asking the authorities not to play the farce *Gajadānanda*, *Hanumān-caritra* or *Police of Pig and sheep*, in the night and similar other farces that were libellous and obscene, any more, on their stage, on pain of penalty under the Ordinance. It is not possible to get at the farces anywhere at this moment, as the first one was in manuscript and the last two extempore, but for the information of our readers, we quote a few lines from the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*,* about this repressive Ordinance of the time :

"The story is soon told. The National Theatrical Company entertained crowded houses with the farce of *Gajadānanda and the prince.* A cry was raised by the friends of Jagadananda that the piece was obscene and disloyal. We did not see it before, but we have seen it since and consider it only a harmless piece enough. However painful it may be to the feelings of Babu Jagadananda and his friends to be thus caricatured, the farce was neither disloyal nor obscene.

"Viceroy gives Lieutenant Governor an Ordinance, but will the Police be judges. The next move of Lord Northbrooke is to suppress objectionable theatrical performances by force."

The Ordinance alarmed the people very much and the *Hindu Patriot*, too, with its conciliatory policy

* 1st March, 1876.

advised a milder course by saying that when the Anglo-Indian community was very much surprised over the feelings of the Hindus in the matter of Royal visit to Jagadananda Babu's house and when a charge of criminal offence might not end in conviction up to the High Court and which might necessitate the presence of the Royal Highness and his suite, which would make him unnecessarily unpopular and that of the Hindu ladies, who assembled to receive him, Government could have shortened the matter by writing a letter to the Director.*

The Hon'ble Mr. Hobhouse, the Law Member, Government of India, while presenting the Dramatic Performances' Bill for further legislation in the Supreme Legislative Council on the 15th March, 1876, sought this to be the main ground for putting it on the legislative anvil. He put his case thus :

"A respectable Hindu gentleman holding a good position in society, one of the legal advisors of the Government and a member of the Legislative Council of Bengal gave an entertainment at his house, which some of the caste-fellows disapproved. In order to punish him, they got up a *play* in which this gentleman, though he had done nothing but what was perfectly lawful, fervently innocent, perfectly honourable, was represented as deliberately selling the honour of himself and his family, in order to get

* *Hindu Patriot*, March 16, 1876.

promotion and money. Now, men were free to choose their own society and if they found even one of their society had violated any of the rules that had been laid down for themselves, they were at liberty to withdraw from association with them, however absurd those rules might be but they were certainly not at liberty to spread abroad falsehood and calumny in order to inflict pain upon him. Yet the *play* was acted, an honourable gentleman, held up to the scorn of an ignorant multitude, as we were told and the undaunted fact was that there was no direct legal power existing in the government to step in and prevent such a proceeding although when the act was done, those who, concerned in it, might and probably would be punished. It was this case, which induced H. E. the Viceroy to issue an Ordinance for the purpose of giving the Government of Bengal, power to control *dramatic performance* and the bill, which was framed on the model of this Ordinance I am seeking leave to introduce."*

III. OTHER DRAMAS

Mr. Hobhouse also mentioned another drama in five acts, *Cākar-darpaṇ Nāṭak,* a mirror of tea-planters, by Babu Dakshina Chatterjee, where a tea-planter, Mr. Maclean by name, treated two ryots Sarada and Barada, recently recruited as coolies, with harshness and cruelty and tried to outrage the modesty

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* Vide, *Englishman*, *16th March*, *1876.*

of Surama, Barada's wife, in his private apartment. It is a prototype of *Nīladarpaṇa Nāṭak** and Sarada and Barada are imitations of Nabinmadhab and Bindumadhab, Nrityakali and Surama those of Sairindhri and Saralata, and Mr. Maclean as Mr. Rogue, Keshab Chakravarty as Gopi Dewan, Madhab as Sadhu, and Nidhu more as Padi Mayrani. This drama was not staged and of this Mr. Hobhouse spoke in the Council rather strongly :

"In the course of the last year a work was printed and published in the form of a drama entitled *Cākar-darpaṇ Nāṭak* which, he might state, meant the mirror of tea-planters. He did not know, who the author was and what his motives were but the work itself was as outrageous a calumny as could possibly be conceived. Its object was to hold up as monsters of iniquity the class of tea-planters and all persons engaged in promoting emigration to the tea-planting districts that was to say, men as respectable as any other body of men in the empire. These gentlemen, who carried on their business with great advantage to all concerned and possibly with a greater portion of advantage to the labourers, they employed than to any one else, had held up to them what was called a mirror in which they were represented as indulging, by way of their ordinary occupation, the basest of passions—cruelty, avarice

* *Vide*, page 97.

and lust. The play was, however, not acted but there it was. Written for the stage and adapted for it in every respect and without any preventive power the Government had, it might be acted at any moment." *

Regarding this drama, which was not staged the *Hiudu Patriot* very reasonably said that the Government did not step in to suppress *Nīladarpaṇa*, whose copy it is, but those, who felt aggrieved thereby, sought for redress in the court and similarly if the tea-planters were to oppose it, court was open to them, as where ordinary law provides, no special power is necessary.†

IV SUKUMARI'S MARRIAGE.

Nor did the Government lack support. The so called educated people of the puritanic section of the community by their views and writings at the time, were also giving moral support to the authorities describing *the stage* in general as a place of obscenity, which, ought, in their opinion, to be stopped. Some interesting events also happened at the time and we shall quote below a few lines coming from a

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* *Englishman*, 16th March, 1876.

The book was published last January from *Samachar Chandrika Press.* No book is available now but a synopsis has been given in the *Englishman*, 15th May, 1875.

† *H. P.* 16th March, 1876.

correspondent of the *Indian Daily News* of 17th March, 1876 :

> "Satisfaction will not be fully realised so long as the walls of the pavillion of this infamous company were not levelled to the ground, its furniture confiscated and sold under the hammers of the state. That this theatre by the introduction of the harlots on the stage became the hot bed of immorality and corruption none can deny—some have gone to the length of saying that "Mirror" has been alienating the sympathy of the Hindus by making ungenerous remarks on the taintless character of the distinguished personages and adorable women of the theatre, who, like Orpheus, burnt with public zeal, were not ashamed even to effect prostitute marriages amongst them.

MARRIAGES IN THE STAGE.

These observations whatever their worth may be, coming from an exclusive section of the community, are referring obviously to the marriage of the celebrated actress Golap-sundari of the Great National, who had come there from "the Bengal Theatre", some time towards the end of 1874. Babu Upendra Nath Das, a son of late Babu Srinath Das, senior vakil, High Court, was the honorary director here and his *Sarat-sarojini* was staged for the first time on January 2nd, 1875. Babu Mahendra Lal Bose appearing in the rôle of Sarat, Raj-kumari (Raja) as Sarojini and Golapsundari as Sukumari. Shooting

on the stage was shown and the Maharajkumar Harendra Kumar Singh of Bettia was one of the distinguished audience. The part of Sukumari was played by Golap and so beautifully and artistically she used to do it that though a new comer, she was more recognised as Sukumari in the theatrical company at first and gradually amongst the public at large. Now Babu Upendra Nath Das was something of a social reformer. Before he became the director of the company here, he had started some schools and newspapers. He was possessed of much breadth of views and himself married an aged widow of another caste incurring thereby the displeasure of his father, which cost him a great deal. To improve the moral condition of actresses his next move was to introduce their marriages and arranged the marriage of Sukumari (Golap) on the 16th February, 1875 under Act III of 1872 with a handsome young man—master Gostha Bihari Dutt under much obligation to him and belonging to the Subarna-Banik caste, with parents alive, and who used to act the part of the scientific man in the same drama. Though a digression, it may be said of the star-actress and an excellent singer that her married life was happy at the beginning and others used to caricature her :

Āmi sakher nārī Sukumari
Āmarā strīpuruṣe act kari
Duniār lok dekhe jāri.

It would, however, not have been so short-lived, had not the irresolute young man Gostha Bihari left his wife and baby without any knowledge on their part and started as a ship-boy (khalasi) for England to find out his patron Upendra Babu, who had already gone there about the middle of April, 1876. He was not heard of since, and Mrs. Sukumari Dutt, reduced to extreme poverty, was next, when all other honest means failed (she started first a coaching-akhra, then wrote a drama *Apurva sati*), forced by circumstances to resume her old profession as an actress. She was, however, so very particular about her daughter's education and healthy training that she placed her under the care and supervision of the late Babu Devi Prasanna Roy Chowdhury, editor (*Navya Bharat*) where getting a decent education the latter too was married to a young man under the Civil Marriage Act (Act III of 1972).

To come to our point, the marriage of Sukumari was highly disliked by the Brahmas, but the credit of the first and healthy reform amongst the actresses, was all due to Upendra Babu.

V. SURENDRA-BINODINI PROSECUTION.

The drama *Surendra-binodini* was, too, from the pen of Upen Babu and like the first was also successful on the stage. This was first acted on the stage of the Bengal Theatre by "the Great National Opera Company and New Bengal Theatrical" under the

name of "New Aryan" on 1875, which, under the management of Babu Nogendra Nath Banerjee, got the exclusive right to stage the play but as the troupe was dispersed during X'mas of the year, it next came to be staged by the Great National under the author's direct supervision from 31st December, 1875. But though no notice was taken before at the Bengal Theatre, it became the subject of prosecution, when it was acted on the 1st March, 1876, at the Great National, the same night Mr. Lamb and his associates communicated the order under the Ordinance. The reason was that at that night the word "Pig and Sheep" was uttered by Mr. Amritalal Bose, when appearing as Magistrate Mc Crimble, he addressed "I am not a tiger, I am not a bear," and further added "I am not a pig, and not a sheep." It was as we said before, the same night, when the farce of *Pig & Sheep* was stopped under the Ordinance. But the subject of the present prosecution was not that the text had been departed from, but that the drama was obscene. There was another scene in the drama in which the same European Magistrate Mr. Mc. Crimble made an attempt of criminal assault on the maid Biraj-mohini, a grown up girl, who jumped down from the balcony to avoid the outrage. Mr. Bose as Magistrate used to come downstairs and in the next scene, carried the girl in his arms and concluded by saying, "By Joe ! the sweet lady ! she had actually jumped down from the balcony,"

Her figure at the time with her clothes, stained with blood, gave the police a handle for prosecution. Mr. Robertson of the River police had been to the theatre in plain clothes and reported strongly "on the drama being libellous and obscene, tending to show that the blood was the result of outrage of the girl by the European Magistrate, whom it tended to show as monster. Besides, the idea was that as the girl was not married, no Hindu would ever marry her but a fallen one."

Prosecution was ordered on the above report and warrants of arrest were issued against Babus Bhuban Mohan Neogi (proprietor), Upendra Nath Das, Director, Amritalal Bose, Manager, Matilal Sur, Mahendra Lal Bose, Amritalal Mukherjee (Bel Babu) Sib Nath Chatterjee and Gopal Chandra Das, actors, Ramataran Sanyal, opera master and Banku Bihari Das as business manager. Proprietor Neogi was not found but surrendered next day in court and the rest were arrested on the theatre premises on the 4th March, when *Satī ki kalaṅkinī* was being actually staged. There was a great stir, actresses began to weep and spectators disappeared. The above gentlemen were sent up for trial on the 5th March, 1876, to the Court of Mr. Dickens, Northern Presidency Magistrate, on the allegations that they wilfully exhibited obscene representations and recited obscene words in public place, viz. the theatre, to the annoyance of others under section 292 and 294 of

the Indian Penal Code. The whole public of Calcutta was shocked at the prosecution and the general opinion highly disapproved of it.

Indeed, the play, as a whole, was not more improper than many of the operas, which were performed on the English stage and many of the plays performed at Covent Garden and Drury Lane theatres. There are questionable passages even in Romeo and Juliet, Merry Wives of Windsor and in many of the French plays, but none has ever been the subject of any prosecution. A large number of gentlemen, both of lead and light, expressed their opinion in favour of the play and various gentlemen gave evidence for the defence. Babus Shyama Charan Sarkar, late Chief Translator to the High Court, Pandit Jogendra Nath Vidyabhusan, editor *Arya Darshan*, Pandit Mahesh Chandra Nyayaratna and Mr. Owen, chief Interpreter of the Calcutta High Court, expressed that the book was not obscene. The Education Gazette considered it highly instructive. The Calcutta Gazette stated that the book inculcated moral lessons. Dr. Rajendra Lal Mitra (afterwards Rajah) gave his opinion on a reference to the scenes in Elliot's 'Adam Bede and Mill on the Floss' that the book was devoid of any obscenity. Babus Dwijendra Nath Tagore and Dwarka Nath Ganguly, two of the most respected leaders of thought of the time, said that the book tended to reform society and that

there was nothing obscene, and last, though not the least, Rev. Dr. K. M. Banerjee from Ballygunge, wrote on the 11th March, 1876 :

"It is a work which indicated a good deal of genius in the author and judging it only as a book without having seen its representation on the stage, I am bound to say, I have not detected any passage, whether obscene in itself or likely to suggest obscene ideas to the reader's mind."

"It is not a book that I could recommend for the perusal of boys and girls but that is all I can say against it and from a moral point of view, I could say as much against some of the novels of Sir Walter Scott himself."

"The scene between the Magistrate and maid Birajmohini appeared to be an imitation of the scene between the Knight Templar and the Jewish maid; only the Bengali author makes the girl actually jump down and then be brought upstairs again, bleeding from the wounds she received by the fall."*

Mr. Dickens, the trying, Magistrate, however, considered the play to be obscene and sentenced only Upendra Babu and Amritalal on the 8th March, 1876, each to suffer one month's simple imprisonment, discharging the rest of the accused . Both the gentlemen received the *fiat* of the court with dignified calmness, which acquires, strength from the

* *Hindu Patriot*, 27th March, 1876.

consciousness of perfect innocence and without a tear, without uttering a word in the form of penitence and without being in the least dissipated, submitted to the court's order. The court room was densely crowded throughout the proceedings, so much so as to call for the frequent interference of the Police.

Srijut Ganesh Chandra Chunder, the well-known solicitor and vakil, instructed by whom appeared Messrs Robert Allen and Wood, Barristers before the Magistrate, considered the above prosecution unjust and had both the above two gentlemen released on bail from the Criminal Bench of the Honourable High Court, presided over by Mr. Justice Phear and Markby.

Mr. W. C. Banerjee, Bar-at-law moved the petition for bail before their Lordships.

Sympathy with actors was so deep and universal that a proposal for presenting a memorial to His Honour the Lieutenant Governor for the liberation of the prisoners was seriously discussed on the 9th March, 1876 at Vakils' library, High Court, should Mr. Justice Phear refuse to interfere in the matter. It was generally feared that the immediate result of the conviction would be total suppression of *the National Theatre*, for there was then scarcely any Bengali play, which, in point of decency, surpassed and very few, which even equalled the one that had been made the subject of criminal prosecution.

For the expenses of the appeal, a benefit performance of *Sarojini* was organised on the 11th March, 1876 with an appeal to the public—

"Patrons and countrymen, now or never is the opportunity to help us". It must be said to the credit of the public that our countrymen heartily responded to the call. The above was the first prosecution of its kind in Calcutta, after Rev. Mr. J. Long, and the *Bangabasi* prosecution was only subsequent to this in 1891.

It must also be admitted that the treatment accorded to the prisoners by Police and Jail authorities was sympathetic and Amrita Babu even the other day shed tears at the marvellous conduct of the Jamadar of the Lalbazar court, who protested with success against handcuffs being used for them. The same Jamadar also arranged for their food. Dr. Mookerjee, the Superintendent of Jail, was also extremely courteous in treatment to the distinguished prisoners.

During the hearing of the appeal Messrs Branson, Palit and Manomohan Ghosh argued the appeal, and vindicated the passages of the drama in the best way they could, quoting from Tennyson and other poets. On the 20th March, 1876, Justices Phear and Markby acquitted both the prisoners on a reference to Regina vs. Stevent 5, Earles Reports page 258, holding that the charge against the prisoners was not specific and that the findings of fact

arrived at by the magistrate were not justified by the evidence recorded at the trial.

Vide, I. L. R. 1 Cal. 356.

THEATRE CASE TRIAL.

Charges were :

1. Both Babus Upendra Nath Das and Amritalal Bose Director and Manager on March 1, 1876, at Great National Theatre wilfully exhibited to public view an obscene representation of a woman having her saree stained with blood in front carried in the arms of a man having his shirt stained with blood in front, intending thereby to represent the immediate results of such woman having been defloured by such man.

2. Babu Amrita Lal Bose as District Magistrate recited and uttered the following obscene words to the annoyance of others :

   (i) Have you got a handsome sister? Send her to my bed one day. I consent to give you some money.

   (ii) Beauty (Sundari), I can't wait any longer. I am still addressing you in soft words. Consent to bestow your love ; if you don't consent, I will take it against your will.

   (iii) Sundari, come to my embrace. I am not a tiger or a bear or a hog. I want to taste your love.

The following experts were examined :

1. John Charles Owen—I am senior Interpreter, High Court—I see *Surendravinodini.* I have read the book. I find, it resembles a novel, called *Twenty Straws*, published in "Bow Bells." It is a play. It is not in my opinion an obscene play for the Bengali Stage. I am acquainted with Bengali plays but not deeply read in them. There are others more indecent. The object of the scene is to excite virtuous indignation towards the magistrate, who is depicted as a villain.
2. Shyama Charan Sarkar—I am skilled in Bengali language and I am a Bengali author. I have not read this play (reads a passage from page 44). I do not see anything obscene in the words. The best poem in the Bengali language is the most immoral. It is worse than this (reads a passage from another page). There is a passage in this page, which, I think, is immoral but not indecent from a Bengali point of view. The words are not indecent. There are worse plays than this by many degrees, the magistrate's conduct is reprehensible. Dramatically speaking the words are not obscene.

Pandit Mahesh Chandra Nyayaratna, Professor, Sanskrit College, Babu Upendra Nath Mazumdar, Devendra Chandra Bose and Jogesh Chandra Sen, witnesses for the defence characterised the play as innocent and a decent one.*

Mr. Allan—Counsel for the defence :

It had been played before and no objection had been

* *Englishman*, March 13, 1876.

raised to it. The play as a whole was not more improper than many of the Operas which were performed on the English stage. The court was aware that there were many plays performed in Covent Garden and Drury Lane which, if not actually obscene, did not at any rate raise the morals. He had only to mention in proof of this the scenes in Sonnambula Travatore and Don Juan and if such plays were performed in the great city which was in the highest state of civilisation, there was really no necessity for plays in Calcutta to be so closely scrutinised—the word 'obscene' has different meanings to different persons, whether the book put before the public had a tendency to incite lust or inculcate immorality is the only question.

Magistrate—Some of the witnesses say that the text had been departed from.

Mr. Wood (Counsel for the 2nd accused):

Prosecution was undertaken because one of the actors had, it appeared, introduced the words 'Hog and Lamb' into the play. They had been forbidden to play the drama of *Police of Pig and Sheep* and one of the actors having introduced the two words into the play, this prosecution had been got up by the Police. To the pure, all things were pure but to the impure they were otherwise. The plays of Shakespeare were really and actually obscene in many points. *Merry Wives of Windsor* was based upon immorality. There were indecent passages in other plays such as *Romeo and Juliet.* The

play was not worse than a majority of the French plays, than many plays of Shakespeare, than, for instance, Roderick Random, a work for reading which Mr. Wood got a thrashing when he was a schoolboy. Whatever the political effect of the play might be such as the revolt which took place in the jail after the lady was indecently assaulted by the magistrate, he would submit there was no obscenity in the play and it was perfectly clear that the defendants had no criminal intention because they had acted in presence of the Police.

The judgment was delivered on 8th March, by Mr. P. D. Dickens,—

Defendant Upendra Nath Das and Amrita Lal Bose were found guilty under sections 292, 294 I. P. C. and sentenced to suffer simple imprisonment for one month. The other defendants were discharged.

In passing judgment the magistrate said:

"The evidence of the defence, it appears to me, proves too much, according to it nothing would be obscene, unless it is couched in obscene words. According to my opinion the passages in evidence are grossly obscene. It appears, a good taste is afforded by the daily newspapers, which have rejected the passages as unfit for publication.

Mr. Justice Phear in delivering judgment on 20th March, 1876 on Revision, expressed that the words and passages whatever amimadversion the use and utterance of them on the occasion may be open to, are not obscene within the

meaning of sections 292, 294 I. P. C., and there was no ground whatever on which the conviction could be legally supported.

Mr. Justice Markby concurred in the judgment. The two prisoners were thus set at liberty.

The judgment of Mr. Justice Phear did a public service by pointing out to the Magistrate how he should deal with evidence in a case like this. Mr. Dickens rejected evidence of experts and Mr. Justice Phear interpreted the true spirit of the play, showing that Legislature was not right in placing full power in the hands of the Magistrate. The judgment also threw sufficient light as to how the two Bills—The Presidency Magistrate's Bill,* and the Dramatic Performances Bill, then before the Council, should have been rectified for the maintenance of liberty of the subjects, and the *Hindu Patriot* regretfully observed that "it did not behove the position of the Government, all powerful as it is, to exercise the giant power it possesses as a giant".†

Nothing, however, could save the passing of the two Bills. It is, however, very striking that soon after the judgment was passed, Mr. Justice Phear left India for good on the 30th March, 1876. Rumour ran afloat that he was forced to tender resignation in place of three months' leave as previously

* By this, a magistrate might be privileged in omitting to record the whole evidence.

† *Hindu Patriot*, 27th March, 1876.

arranged. But whether he went on leave or resignation and whether it was voluntary or forced as a result of pressure put upon him by Lord North Brooke's Government, we need not pause to ponder. This much, however, is certain that he won the hearts of the people and before he left never to come again, Lady Phear was accorded an address by ladies of the Hindu Mahila school at the house of Late Babu Durgamohan Das (father of Mr. S. R. Das, late Law Member, Government of India and Mr. Justice J. R. Das of Rangoon High Court and uncle of the late Deshabandhu C. R. Das). *

As we said before, a section of the Brahmas was very jubilant over the conviction and voiced their sentiments as those of the Reform Association through the *Mirror*† :

"We thank the Viceroy and we thank the Police and Mr. Dickens for their noble efforts to stem the tide of public immorality."—

And went so far as to pass a resolution to the effect. To this all papers dissented and the *Hindu Patriot* wrote very strongly :

"It is indeed very funny to conclude from a resolution of a society the existence of which is unknown to the public that the recent arbitrary acts of Government have given universal satisfaction.

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* *Hindu Patriot*, 27th March, 1876.

† *Vide*, *Indian Mirror* of 12th March, 1876.

It would help nobody to discuss whether the above representation was deliberately made or not but our contemporary ought to have known that the native community feels sorely the late arbitrary proceedings of the Government, the Magistrate and the Police and the people are really very much alarmed".

THE DRAMATIC PERFORMANCES' CONTROL BILL.

The anticipated failure of the above prosecution seems to be the real cause of forcing the Bill into the Dramatic Performances Act and it is a very curious coincidence that on the very day Mr. Justice Phear's judgment was delivered (20th March, 1876), Mr. Hobbhouse, the Law Member moved the Bill at the Legislative Council of which we said before.

The Dramatic Performances' Control Bill ran thus :

"That whenever the Government was of opinion that any dramatic performance was scandalous or defamatory or likely to excite feelings of dissatisfaction towards the Government or likely to cause pain to any private party in its performance, or was otherwise prejudicial to the interest of the public, Government might prohibit such a performance".

Section 7 further provides—

"If any Magistrate has reason to believe that any house, room or place is used or is about to be used for any performance prohibited under

the Act, he may by warrant authorise any officer of Police to enter with such assistance as may be requisite by night or by day and by force if necessary to enter any such house, room or place and to take into custody all persons whom he finds there *for the said purpose*".

After the presentation of the Bill for consideration, protest meetings were held in various places and the press also took up the cause but nothing, however, as often is the case, prevailed.

After the Bill was presented in the house and members of the Council considered the Bill, it was placed before a select committee consisting of the members :—Mr. Cockrel, Raja Narendra Krishna Deb Bahadur, Sir Alexender Arbuthnot and Mr. Hobbhouse. They agreed unanimously that the Bill should be passed. *

It was next placed to the Legislative Council for final debates and then passed into the Dramatic Performances' Act of 1876.

As to its provisions we can not perhaps do a whit better than refer to our readers the most learned article of Babu Kristodas Pal that appeared in the pages of the *Hindu Patriot* on the 11th December, 1876, voicing in nutshell the objections of the public, after the final debates in the Council were held.

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* Page 346, *Indian Gazette*, 25th March, 1876,

Indeed, there was no justification of the bill as the general law of the Penal Code was sufficient for all practical purposes. Mr. Hobbhouse's stock argument, 'prevention was worth all the punishment and it would be a poor satisfaction to punish offenders after the mischief is done,' laboured under the great fallacy, as seditious articles or speeches are never censored before they are delivered, and the mischief, if any, is only punished after it is done. The same should have been the case with Performances also. Similarly, a gentleman might be held to scorn and hatred of the public by some rabid article in a newspaper and would the Legislature give protection to him by establishing a censor of the press or would leave him to seek redress in a court of justice ? As for obscenity, opinions will always differ and it is not at all fair to leave it to the executive authorities to pronounce what is and what is not obscene. Now, for instance, in the National Theatre case, the Executive authorities pronounced the drama *Surendravinodini* as obscene but the High Court upon the evidence of experts found it to be devoid of obscenity. The obnoxious Bill, therefore, took away from the constituted courts of justice the power of giving a judicial decision upon the character of a drama and has thus vested the sole authority in the executive officers. The principle underlying the Bill was, therefore, open to serious objection.

Then, as for the details, the Bill does not include private entertainments and refers only to the performances held in a public place, that is, "Any building or enclosure to which the public are admitted to witness a performance on payment of money." Further, Yatras, like performances and religious observances are exempted from the operation of the Act. But a conviction or discharge under this Act does not bar a prosecution under section 124A (sedition) or section 294 of the Indian Penal Code.

Coercive measures are neither necessary nor calculated to foster any cordial feeling. Sir Richard Temple, the then Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, however, expressed thankfulness at the moral support, received from Raja Narendra Krishna Deb* but nothing succeeded to dissuade him from his move inspite of protests from the bar and though Mr. W. C. Banerjee made a strong case on behalf of the Theatrical Companies. The Bill received the assent of the Governor General of India, Lord Lytton, who had recently arrived in India, on the 16th December, 1876 and was thus passed into law.

Babu Dharmadas Sur in his autobiographical account gives also a history and the Patrika voiced the feelings of the people, "It so much curtailed the liberty of the people."

And it wrote in despair—

"That we are practically lifeless under the burden

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* Raja Narendra Krishna Deb Bahadur said,

of the administrators and if Government continue to rule by the enforcement of such laws, we shall have to seek a region where the frowns of the present administration will simply fall on our deaf ears." *

The Act extended to the whole of India and by the powers it conferred on the Local Governments, it can stop the performance and suppress or forfeit any drama, which, in its opinion, may be considered seditious, obscene or defamatory. Seeking to render the growth of dramatic literature healthy and sound, it has curbed the national spirit and checked the progress and further development the national dramatic literature was growing into and promised. Since then there have been no national dramas, and we give here an instance. The Swadeshi movement of 1905 was the ebullition of a national consciousness in all the spheres of our national life, and inspite of the rigours of the law, came out two most epoch-making dramas *Sherajuddola* and *Mirkasim* from the pen of the master-mind Girish Chandra Ghose and staged on successive nights. It would be no exaggeration to say that what ten platforms could not do, a single performance of either play was enough to educate the public mind to such an extent as greatly alarmed the Government. The real history of the 18th century

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* *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 14th December, 1876.

distorted as always has been by Western historians is the first lesson for a student of nationalism to learn and this the Bengali youths were most profitably getting in those stirring times from the hitherto much despised stage. The two dramas revolutionised the ideas and mentality of the people and were followed by *Chatrapati Sivaji* of the same author and *Palasir Prayaschitta* and *Nandakumar* of Pandit Khirod Prasad Vidyavinod. Some scenes and songs of *Shajahan, Mewar-patan and Durgadas* of the late Mr. D. L. Roy also helped greatly to grow the national mind. The authorities, however, had soon their attention drawn to the effect produced by the stage, which in the years 1904-1909 became practically one of the chief processes of nation-building and put the books under proscription in 1910-11 instead of having asked the authors to obliterate the scenes and passages considered objectionable in their opinion. These are all now lost to us and we have at present no national drama, so to say. No doubt, the ban has been partially withdrawn from Dvijendra Lal's dramas, but those have been restored only in a mutilated form. Similarly Golok Bose's woes will no more be heard in *Nīladarpaṇa*, Bankim Chandra's Lawrencefoster has now been converted into a Portuguese Ganjalis and the white tea-planter of Assam in *Sanshar* has now been changed into a Bengali villain, practising as a doctor.

It will be interesting to our readers to learn that

within the next three months, The Vernacular Press Act was also passed into law by the same Government by Lord Lytton on the 14th November, 1877. Thus, both the press and the stage were gagged, as both have the tendency to spread a spirit of love of liberty amongst the people. The ban on the press was soon, however, removed by the liberal Government of Lord Ripon, but the Dramatic Performances' Act for the last 56 years has been hanging like a Damocle's sword over the stage.

The year 1876 also marked the close of the English Stage in Calcutta. Mrs. Lewis, before leaving the shores of India, is said to have remarked, that owing to the disgraceful conduct of some members of her troupe, she was compelled to dissolve it and the losses she suffered might be estimated at Rs. 20,000/-.

Henceforth, the Bengali Stage declined to its worst condition. Demoralisation set in, Bhuvan mohan was turned penniless and no new drama was produced ; and had not the great revivalist and the father of the Bengali Stage come into the field with all his might, we would no more have heard of the Bengali stage and drama in Bengal ; but of him in the next volume.

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BENGALI DRAMAS

(when and where first staged)

Year	Drama	Place where staged	Reference in this book
1778	Chitrayajna	Not traced	6
1795	Chhadmavesh	25, Dhorumtolla	7 and 219, 258 Vol. I
1821	Kalirajar yatra and other similar dramas	Calcutta	7, 9
1822	The Comroopa yatra	Shyamsundar Das's house, Calcutta	10
1852	Bhadrarjun Natak (Tarachand Sikdar)	Not definite if played	17—20
1856	Kulinkulasarvaswa (Ramnarain's)	Jayram Basak's House	29
	Swarna-srinkhal	Barisal	35
1853, 30th Jan.	Sakuntala (Nandalal Roy)	Ashu Deb's House	36
1857 Sept.	Mahasweta		38

At Vidyotsahini Theatre.

1857, 11th April	Veni-sanhar	40
1857, 24th Nov.	Vikramorvashi	45
1858, 5th June	Savitri-satyaban	

At Belgachhia Theatre.

1858, 31st July	Ratnavali (Ramnarain)	55, 65
1859, 3rd Sept.	Sarmistha (Madhusudan)	66, 73
1859, 27th April	Vidhava-vivaha Natak	88

At East Bengal Stage, Dacca.

1861	Nildarpan Natak (Dinabandhu)	91

At Pathuriaghata Theatre.

Jorasanko Theatre.

Sobhabazar Theatre.

1/5, 2/6, Raja Navakrishna Street

Bowbazar Theatre.

3, Viswanath Matilal Lane.

Other Theatres.

National Theatre.

337, Upper Chitpur Road (Jorasanko)

* The first performance at Public Theatre.

1873

4th Jan.	Nabin Tapaswini	190
8th Feb.	Noisho Rupea	193
15th Feb.	Bharatmata	200
22nd Feb.	Krishna-kumari Natak (with Girish as Bhimsing)	201
8th March	Buroshalikar Ghare Row.	205
10th May	Kapalkundala.	213
10th Dec.	Hemalata Natak (Haralal Roy)	116
20th Dec.	Kamalekamini (Dinabandhu)	,,

1874

10th Jan.	Amitavinodini (Srinath Chaudhury)	231
17th Jan.	Kusum-kumari	
31st Jan.	(Bajerer Larai)	
14th Feb.	Mrinalini (Bankim)	

Bengal Theatre.

9/3 Beadon Street.

1873

16th Aug.	Sarmistha	222
30th Aug.	Mayakanan.	
6th Sept.	Mohanter Eki Kaj	,,
20th Dec.	Durgesh-nandini.	225

1874

2nd May	Durgesh-nandini	
22nd Aug.	Puruvikram (Jyotirindra)*	

1875

6th March	Meghanadbadh	225-227
25th March	Durgesh-nandini	,,
20th May	Malhar Rao Gaekwar	,,
14th Aug.	Surendra-vinodini (under Nagendra Banerjee in New Aryan Theatre)	,,
4th Sept.	Birnari	,,

* Probably not staged.

* Actresses were employed.